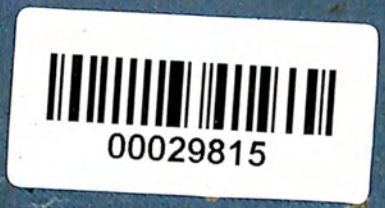
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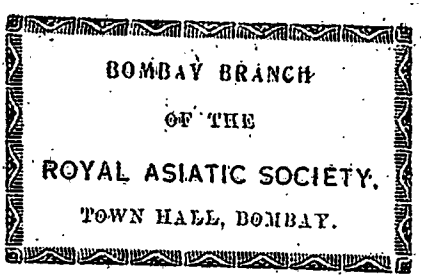

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KING OF FRANCE.

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MARIE DE MEDICIS.

Second Queen of Henry 4th of France

THE LIFE

OF

MARIE DE MEDICIS,

QUEEN OF FRANCE,

CONSORT OF HENRY IV., AND REGENT OF THE KINGDOM UNDER LOUIS XIII.

BY MISS PARDOE,

AUTHOR OF

"LOUIS XIV. AND THE COURT OF FRANCE IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY,"
"THE CITY OF THE SULTAN," &c.

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

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TO

MR. AND MRS. CHARLES BECKET,

(OF HEVER COURT, KENT,)

THESE VOLUMES

ARE VERY AFFECTIONATELY INSCRIBED,

BY

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

ALL the existing records of European royalty do not, probably, comprise the annals of a life of greater vicissitude than that which has been chosen as the subject of the present work. We find numerous examples in History of queens who have suffered exile, imprisonment, and death; but we believe that the unfortunate Marie de Medicis is the only authenticated instance of a total abandonment on the part alike of her family and friends, which terminated almost in starvation. Certain it is that after having occupied the throne of France, presided over its councils, and given birth to the ancestor of a long line of princes, she was ultimately indebted to the sympathy and attachment of a foreign artist, of whom she had once been the zealous patron, for a roof under which to terminate her miserable existence! The whole life of this ill-fated Queen is, indeed, full of startling contrasts from which the mind shrinks back appalled; and her entire career is so freighted with

alternate grandeur and privation that it is difficult to reconcile the possibility of their having fallen to the share of the same individual; and this too in an age when France, above all other nations, boasted of its chivalry, and when some of the greatest names that have ever figured in its annals gave grace and glory to its history.

The times were, moreover, as remarkable as the men by whom they were illustrated; for despite the civil and foreign wars by which they were so unhappily distinguished, the arts flourished, and the spread of political liberty became apparent; although it is equally certain that they were at the same time fatal alike to the aristocracy and to the magistrature; and that they rapidly paved the way to the absolutism of Louis XIV., to the shameless saturnalia of the Regency, and to the dishonouring and degrading excesses of Louis XV., who may justly be said to have prepared by his licentiousness the scaffold of his successor.

During several centuries the French monarchs had indulged in a blind egotism, which rendered them unable to appreciate the effects of their own errors upon their subjects. L'ÉTAT C'EST MOI had unfortunately been practically their ruling principle long ere Louis XIV. ventured to put it into words. To them the court was the universe, the aristocracy the nation, and the church the corner-stone of the proud altar upon which they had enthroned themselves, and beyond which they cared not either to look or listen. A fatal mistake fatally

expiated! Yet, as we have already remarked, the system, dangerous and hollow as it was, endured for centuries—endured until crime was heaped on crime, and the fearful holocaust towered towards Heaven as if to appeal for vengeance. And that vengeance came! It had been long delayed; so long indeed that when the brilliant courtiers of Versailles were told of disaffection among the masses, and warned to conciliate ere it was too late the good-will of their inferiors, they listened with contemptuous carelessness to the tardy caution, and scorned to place themselves in competition with those untitled classes whom they had long ceased to regard as their fellow-men. But the voice of the people is like the stroke of the hammer upon the anvil; it not only makes itself heard, but, however great may be the original resistance, finishes by fashioning the metal upon which it falls, after its own will.

During the reign of Louis XIII. this great and fatal truth had not yet been impressed upon the French nation, for the popular voice was stifled beneath the dicta of despotism; and even the *tiers-état*—important as the loyalty of that portion of a kingdom must ever be to its rulers — were treated with disdain and contumely; but throughout all the workings of his government, or rather the government of his minister, for the son of Marie de Medicis was a monarch only in name, may be traced the undercurrent of popular indignation and discontent, which gradually swelling and heaving into power during the two suc-

ceeding reigns, finally overthrew with its giant waves the last frail barrier which still up-reared itself before a time-honoured throne; and built upon the ruins of an ancient monarchy the tinsel temple and the false shrine, whose idol was born in groans, and baptized in blood.

The incapacity of the King, the venality of the princes, the arrogance of the hierarchy, the insubordination of the nobles, the licentiousness of the court, the despotism of the government; all the errors and all the vices of their rulers, were jealously noted and bitterly registered by an oppressed and indignant people; but it required time to shake off a yoke which had been so long borne that it had eaten into the flesh; nor, moreover, were the minds of the masses in that age sufficiently awakened to a sense of their own collective power to enable them, as they did in the following century, to measure their strength with those upon whom they had been so long accustomed to look with fear and awe.

There cannot, moreover, exist the slightest doubt that the wantonness with which Richelieu, in furtherance of his own private interests, poured out so freely on the scaffold some of the proudest blood of France, did much towards destroying that *prestige* which had hitherto environed the high nobility. When Biron perished upon the block, although his death was decreed by the sovereign, and that sovereign, moreover, was their own idolized Henry IV., the people marvelled and even murmured; but in after-years, they learned

through the teaching of the Cardinal that nobles were merely men; while the exile of the persecuted Marie de Medicis, and the privations to which she was exposed through his agency, taught them that even royalty itself was not invulnerable to the malice or vengeance of its opponents; and unhappily for those by whom he was succeeded in power, the lesson brought forth its fruits in due season.

Thus much premised, I shall confine myself to a brief explanation of the manner in which I have endeavoured to perform my self-imposed task. For one wilful, but as I trust excusable, inaccuracy, I throw myself on the indulgence of my critics. Finding my pages already overladen with names, and that they must consequently induce a considerable strain upon the memory of such individuals as might not chance to be intimately acquainted with the domestic history of the period under consideration, I have, from the commencement of the work, designated the Duke de Sully by the title which he ultimately attained, and by which he is universally known, rather than confuse the mind of my reader by allusions to M. de Béthune, M. de Rosny, and finally M. de Sully, when each and all merely signified the same individual; and I feel persuaded that this arrangement will be generally regarded as a judicious one, inasmuch as it tends to lessen a difficulty already sufficiently great; a fact which will be at once apparent on reference to the biographical table at the head of each volume.

On the other hand I have, contrary to my previous system, but in justice to myself, carefully, and even perhaps somewhat elaborately, multiplied the foot-notes, in order to give with precision the several authorities whence I deduced my facts; and I must be excused should this caution appear uselessly tedious or pedantic to the general reader, as I am anxious on this occasion to escape the accusation which was once brought against me when it was equally undeserved, of having "quoted at second-hand," and even drawn my materials from "historical romances of the time." It is, of course, easy to make assertions of this nature at random; but when a writer feels that he or she has conscientiously performed a duty voluntarily undertaken, it is painful to be misjudged; especially when, as in the present instance, nearly three years have been devoted to the work.

For the *fac-simile* letters by which my volumes are enriched, I am indebted to the kindness of M. de la Plane, a member of the Institut Royal de France, of whose extensive and valuable cabinet of ancient records they now form a part; and by whom their publication was obligingly authorised. The authenticity of these letters admits of no doubt, as it is known that they originally formed a portion of the rich collection of autographs in the possession of the Marshal de Bassompierre, to whom they were severally addressed; and that at his death they were transferred to the library of the Fathers of the Oratory at St. Magloire in Paris; whence (it is believed

at the Revolution) they fell into the hands of a member of that celebrated society, Le Père de Mevolhon, formerly Canon and Vicar-General of the diocese of St. Omer, by whom they were presented to M. de la Plane.

The *fac-simile* page of Memoirs will require a more detailed explanation. At the time when he so kindly intrusted to me the letters above-named, the same obliging friend also confided to my care, with full permission to make whatever use of it I should see fit, an unpublished MS. consisting of nearly twelve thousand pages closely written, and divided into twenty-four volumes small quarto, all undeniably the work of one hand. This elaborate MS. was entitled "Memoirs of M. le Commandeur de Rambure, Captain of the regiment of French Guards, Gentleman of the Bed-chamber under the Kings Henry IV., Louis XIII., and Louis XIV. surnamed the Great, with all the most memorable events which took place during the reigns of those three Majesties, from the year 1594 to that of 1660."

The author of this voluminous MS., who, at the age of eighty-one, inscribes his work to his *uncle*, Monseigneur de Rambure, Bishop of Vannes, and who professes to have ventured thus tardily upon his Herculean undertaking at the request, and for the instruction, of his nephew the Marquis de Rambure, lays strict injunctions upon his successors to keep the record of his life to themselves; alleging as his reason a dread of injuring by his revelations the interests of the young

courtier, who had succeeded to his own post of Gentleman of the Bedchamber; "and that," as he proceeds to say; "to the greatest King in the world, by whom he has the honour to be loved and esteemed; therefore I pray you that this writing may never be printed, in order not to make him enemies, who are too ready to come without being sought by our imprudence; and because I have only composed these Memoirs for myself and my kindred."

This curious work is at present the property of the Count d'Inguimbert of Avignon; who, having lost his father at an early age, is not aware of the precise manner in which it fell into the possession of his family. Thus much, however, is certain, that it has for a considerable length of time been religiously preserved by his ancestors; and that the Countess his mother (sister of the last Count de Bruges, aide-de-camp to Charles X.), who died a few years ago at an advanced age, had never ventured, in obedience to the injunction above-mentioned, to intrust it to any one.

The author states that the work is not in his own autograph, but in that of his secretary, to whom he dictated during eleven years four hours each day, two in the morning, and two in the afternoon—and that he commenced his formidable task in the year 1664, when he was living in retirement in his Commanderie of St. Eugène in Limousin and, despite his advanced age, "in possession of all his

faculties as perfectly as when he had only reached his twenty-fifth year."

It is but very recently that the present proprietor of the Memoirs, rightly judging that the time has long elapsed in which the disclosures of the chronicler in question could conduce to the injury of any one connected with him (should such individuals indeed now exist), has consented to permit of their perusal; and that only by a limited number of literary friends, all of whom have been astonished by their extraordinary variety of information, marvellous detail, and intimate acquaintance, not only with the principal events of the seventeenth century (the writer having lived to the patriarchal age of ninety-six years), but also with the leading actors in each and all of them. As a literary curiosity I have thought a *fac-simile* of one of the pages of this elaborate chronicle a desirable addition to my own volumes; which are, moreover, through the kindness of MM. d'Inguimbert and de la Plane, enriched by numerous curious extracts from these unpublished Memoirs, no part of which has previously appeared in print.

LONDON, MAY, 1852.

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BOOK I.

MARIE DE MEDICIS AS QUEEN.

CHAPTER 1.

[1572.]

MARRIAGES OF HENRY IV.—MARGUERITE DE VALOIS—HER CHARACTER—HER MARRIAGE WITH THE KING OF NAVARRE—MASSACRE OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW—HENRY, DUKE D'ANJOU, ELECTED SOVEREIGN OF POLAND—DEATH OF CHARLES IX.—ACCESSION OF HENRY III.—CONSPIRACY OF THE DUKE D'ALENÇON—REVEALED BY MARGUERITE—HENRY OF NAVARRE ESCAPES FROM THE FRENCH COURT—HENRY OF NAVARRE PROTESTS AGAINST HIS ENFORCED OATH—MARGUERITE IS IMPRISONED BY HER BROTHER—THE DUKE D'ALENÇON RETURNS TO HIS ALLEGIANCE—MARGUERITE JOINS HER HUSBAND AT BEARN—DOMESTIC DISCORD—MARRIAGE-PORTION OF MARGUERITE—COURT OF NAVARRE—DUPIN INSULTS THE QUEEN OF NAVARRE—CATHERINE DE MEDICIS INDUCES MARGUERITE TO RETURN TO FRANCE—THE DUKE D'ALENÇON AGAIN REVOLTS—MARGUERITE ARRESTS A ROYAL COURIER—SHE IS BANISHED WITH IGNOMINY FROM THE FRENCH COURT—SHE IS DEPRIVED OF HER ATTENDANTS—HENRY OF NAVARRE REFUSES TO RECEIVE HER IN THE PALACE—MARGUERITE RETIRES TO AGEN—HER LICENTIOUSNESS—AGEN IS STORMED AND TAKEN BY THE MARSHAL DE MATIGNON—MARGUERITE ESCAPES TO THE FORTRESS OF CARLAT—THE INHABITANTS OF THE TOWN RESOLVE TO DELIVER HER UP TO THE FRENCH KING—SHE IS MADE PRISONER BY THE MARQUIS DE CANILLAC, AND CONVEYED TO USSON—SHE SEDUCES THE GOVERNOR OF THE FORTRESS—DEATH OF THE DUKE D'ALENÇON—POVERTY OF MARGUERITE—ACCESSION OF HENRY IV.—HE EMBRACES THE CATHOLIC FAITH—HIS DISSIPATED HABITS—THE DUKE DE BOUILLON HEADS THE HUGUENOT PARTY—HENRY IV. PROCEEDS TO BRITTANY, AND THREATENS M. DE BOUILLON—FESTIVITIES AT RENNES—HENRY IV. BECOMES MELANCHOLY—HE RESOLVES TO DIVORCE MARGUERITE, AND TAKE A SECOND WIFE—EUROPEAN PRINCESSES—HENRY DESIRES TO MARRY LA BELLE GABRIELLE—SULLY EXPOSTULATES—SULLY PROPOSES A DIVORCE TO MARGUERITE—THE DUCHESS DE BEAUFORT INTRIGUES TO PREVENT THE MARRIAGE OF THE KING WITH MARIE DE MEDICIS—SHE BRIBES SILLERY—DIPLOMACY OF SILLERY—GABRIELLE ASPIRES TO THE THRONE OF FRANCE—HER DEATH—MARGUERITE CONSENTS TO A DIVORCE—THE POPE DECLARES THE NULLITY OF HER MARRIAGE—GRIEF OF THE KING AT THE DEATH OF GABRIELLE—ROYAL PLEASURES—A NEW INTRIGUE—MADEMOISELLE D'ENTRAGUES—HER TACT—HER CHARACTER—A LOVE-MESSENGER—VALUE OF A ROYAL FAVOURITE—COSTLY INDULGENCES—A PRACTICAL REBUKE—DIPLOMACY OF MADEMOISELLE D'ENTRAGUES—THE WRITTEN PROMISE—MADEMOISELLE D'ENTRAGUES IS CREATED MARQUISE DE VERNEUIL.

THE LIFE

OF

MARIE DE MEDICIS.

CHAPTER I.

[1572.]

However celebrated he was destined to become as a sovereign, Henri IV. of France was nevertheless fated to be singularly unfortunate as a husband. Immediately after the death of his mother, the high-hearted Jeanne d'Albret, whom he succeeded on the throne of Navarre, political considerations induced him to give his hand to Marguerite, the daughter of Henry II. and Catherine de Medicis, a princess whose surpassing beauty and rare accomplishments were the theme and marvel of all the European courts, and whose alliance was an object of ambition to many of the sovereign princes of Christendom.

Marguerite de Valois was born on the 14th of May, 1552, and became the wife of Henry of Navarre on

the 18th of August, 1572, when she was in the full bloom of youth and loveliness; nor can there be any doubt that she was one of the most extraordinary women of her time; for while her grace and wit dazzled the less observant by their brilliancy, the depth of her erudition, her love of literature and the arts, and the solidity of her judgment, no less astonished those who were capable of appreciating the more valuable gifts which had been lavished upon her by nature. A dark shadow rested, however, upon the surface of this glorious picture. Marguerite possessed no moral self-government; her passions were at once the bane and the reproach of her existence; and while yet a mere girl her levity had already afforded ample subject for the comments of the courtiers.

Fortunately, in the rapid sketch which we are compelled to give of her career, it is unnecessary that we should do more than glance at the licentiousness of her private conduct; our business is simply to trace such an outline of her varying fortunes as may suffice to render intelligible the position of Henry IV. at the period of his second marriage.

After the death of Francis II., when internal commotion had succeeded to the feigned and hollow reconciliation which had taken place between Charles IX. and Henry de Lorraine, Duke de Guise,* Marguerite

* Henry de Lorraine, Duke de Guise, was the brother of Charles, Duke de Mayenne, and of Louis, Cardinal de Guise. He was the chief of the League, and excited a popular revolt on the

and her younger brother, the Duke d'Alençon, were removed to the castle of Amboise for greater security; and she remained in that palace-fortress from her tenth year until 1564, when she returned to court, and thenceforward became one of the brightest ornaments of the royal circle. Henry de Guise was not long ere he declared himself her ardent admirer, and the manner in which the Princess received and encouraged his attentions left no doubt that the affection was reciprocal; so convinced, indeed, were those about her person of the fact, that M. du Gast, the favourite of the King her brother, earnestly entreated his Majesty no longer to confide to the Princess, as he had hitherto done, all the secrets of the state, as they could not, he averred fail, under existing circumstances, to be communicated to M. de Guise; and Charles IX. so fully appreciated the value of this advice, that he hastened to urge the same caution upon the Queen-mother. This sudden distrust and coldness on the part of her royal relatives was peculiarly irritating to Marguerite; nor was her mortification lessened by the fact that the Duke de Guise, first alarmed, and ultimately disgusted, by her unblushing irregularities, withdrew his pretensions to her hand; and, sacrificing his ambition to a

day of the Barricades, in the hope of possessing himself of the crown. Henry III. caused him to be assassinated at Blois, in the year 1588. He was distinguished as *le Balafré* by the people, in consequence of the deep scar of a wound across the face by which he was disfigured.

sense of self-respect, selected as his wife, Catherine de Clèves, Princess de Portien.*

At this period Marguerite de Valois began to divide her existence between the most exaggerated devotional observances and the most sensual and degrading pleasures. Humbly kneeling before the altar, she would assist at several masses during the day; but at twilight she cast off every restraint; and careless of what was due, alike to her sex and to her rank, she plunged into the grossest dissipation; and after having played the guest at a riotous banquet, she might be seen sharing in the disgraceful orgies of a masquerade.† A short time after the marriage of the Duke de Guise, the hand of the Princess was demanded by Don Sebastian, King of Portugal; but the Queen-mother, who witnessed with alarm the increasing power of the Protestant party, and the utter impossibility of inspiring confidence in their leaders save by some bold and subtle stroke of policy, resolved to profit by the presence of the Huguenot King

* Catherine was the second daughter of François de Clèves, Duke de Nevers, and of Marguerite de Bourbon-Vendôme, the aunt of Henry IV. Her dower consisted of the county of Eu, in Normandy. She was twice married; first to Antoine de Croi, Prince de Portien, by whom she had no issue; and, secondly, to Henry de Lorraine, Duke de Guise. She died in 1633, at the age of eighty-five years.

† She heard three masses every day, one high and two low ones, and took the holy communion each week on the Thursdays, Fridays, and Sundays.—*Letter of Etienne Pasquier*, Book XXII, letter v, col. 666, of the folio edition.

of Navarre, in order to overcome the distrust which not even the edict of 1570 had sufficed to remove; and to renew the project which had been already mooted during the lifetime of Jeanne d'Albret, of giving Marguerite in marriage to the young Prince, her son.

The consciousness that she was sacrificing her daughter by thus bestowing her hand upon the sovereign of a petty kingdom might perhaps have deterred Catherine, had she not already decided upon the means by which the bonds of so unequal an alliance might be rent asunder; and it is even possible that the hatred which she bore to the reformed faith would in itself have sufficed to render such an union impossible, had not the crafty and compunctionless spirit by which she was animated inspired her with a method which would more than expiate the temporary sin. It is at all events certain, that having summoned Henry of Navarre to her presence, she unhesitatingly, and with many professions of regard for himself, informed him of the overtures of the Portuguese monarch, assuring him at the same time, that although the King of Spain was opposed to the alliance from motives of personal interest, it was one which would prove highly gratifying to Gregory XIII.; but adding that both Charles IX. and herself were so anxious to perform the promise which they had made to his mother, and to prove their good faith to his own person, that they were willing to refuse the crown of Portugal, and to accept that of Navarre for the Princess.

Henry of Bearn hesitated. He was aware that the chiefs of the Protestant party, especially the Admiral de Coligny whom he regarded as a father, were desirous that he should become the husband of Elizabeth of England. Past experience had rendered them suspicious of the French, while an alliance with the English promised them a strong and abiding protection. Nor was Henry himself more disposed to espouse Marguerite de Valois, as her early reputation for gallantry offended his sense of self-respect, while a strong attachment elsewhere rendered him insensible to her personal attractions. As a matter of ambition, the alliance was beyond his hopes, and brought him one step nearer to that throne which, by some extraordinary prescience, both he and his friends anticipated that he was destined one day to ascend;* but he could not forget that there were dark suspicions attached to the strange and sudden death of a mother to whom he had been devoted; and he felt doubly repugnant to receive a wife from the very hands which were secretly accused of having abridged his passage to the sovereignty of Navarre. Like Marguerite herself, moreover, he was not heart-whole; and thus he clung to the freedom of an unmarried life, and would fain have declined the honour which was pressed

* By some extraordinary presentiment they always imagined that they saw a King of France in the Prince of Navarre, even at a time when the greatest obstacles were opposed to such an idea.—*Dreux du Radier, Mémoires des Reines et Régentes de France,* vol. v, p. 130. See also "Mémoires de Sully," vol. i, pp. 60—67.

upon him; but the wily Catherine, who instantly perceived his embarrassment, bade him carefully consider the position in which he stood, and the fearful responsibility which attached to his decision. Charles IX., in bestowing upon him the hand of his sister, gave to the Protestants the most decided and unequivocal proof of his sincerity. It was evident, she said, that despite the edict which assured protection to the Huguenot party, they still misdoubted the good-faith of the monarch; but when he had also overlooked, or rather disregarded, the difference of faith so thoroughly as to give a Princess of France in marriage to one of their Princes, they would no longer have a pretext for discontent, and the immediate pacification of the kingdom must be the necessary consequence of such a concession. The ultimate issue of so unequal a conflict, could not, as she asserted, be for one moment doubtful; but the struggle might be a bloody one, and he would do well to remember that the blood thus spilt would be upon his own head.

Henry then sought, as his mother had previously done, to create a difficulty by alleging that the difference of faith between himself and the Princess must tend to affect the validity of their marriage; but the wily Italian met this objection by reminding him that Charles IX. had publicly declared that "rather than that the alliance should not take place, he would permit his sister to dispense with all the rites and ceremonies of both religions."

It is well known that the motive of the French king in thus urging, or rather insisting upon, a marriage greatly beneath the pretensions of the Princess, was simply to attract to court all the Huguenot leaders, who, placing little faith in the conciliatory edict, had resolutely abstained from appearing in the capital; but Catherine alluded so slightly to this fact that it awoke no misgivings in the mind of the young monarch.

Thus abjured, Henry of Navarre yielded; nor did the Princess on her part offer any violent opposition to the marriage She objected, it is true, her religious scruples, and her attachment to her own creed; but her arguments were soon overruled, the hand of the King of Portugal was courteously declined, Philip of Spain was assured that his representations had decided the French court, and immediate preparations were made for the unhappy union, whose date was to be written in blood. The double ceremony, exacted by the difference of faith in the contracting parties, was performed, as we have said, on the 18th of August, 1572, the public betrothal having taken place on the preceding day at the Louvre; and it was accompanied by all the splendour of which it was susceptible. The marriage-service was performed by the Cardinal de Bourbon, on a platform erected in the front of the metropolitan church of Notre-Dame; whence, at its conclusion, the bridal train descended by a temporary gallery to the interior of the cathedral, and proceeded to the altar, where Henry, relinquishing the hand of his new-made

wife, left her to assist at the customary mass, and meanwhile paced to and fro along the cloisters in conversation with the venerable Gaspard de Coligny and others of his confidential friends, the whole of whom were sanguine in their anticipations of a bright and happy future.

At the conclusion of the mass the King of Navarre rejoined his bride, and taking her hand, conducted her to the episcopal palace, where, according to an ancient custom, the marriage-banquet awaited them.* The square of the Parvis Notre-Dame was crowded with eager spectators, and the heart of the Queen-mother beat high with exultation as she glanced at the retinue of the bridegroom, and recognised in his suite all the Huguenot leaders who had hitherto refused to pass the gates of the capital.

Save her own, however, all eyes were rivetted upon Marguerite; and many were the devout Catholics who murmured beneath their breath at the policy which had determined the monarch to bestow a princess of such beauty and genius upon a heretic. In truth, nothing could be more regal or more dazzling than the appearance of the youthful bride, who wore, as Queen of Navarre, a richly-jewelled crown, beneath which her long and luxuriant dark hair fell in waving masses over an ermine cape (or *couet*) clasped from the throat to the waist with large diamonds; while her voluminous

* Dreux du Radier, vol. v, p. 182.

train of violet-coloured velvet, three ells in length, was borne by four princesses.* And thus, in royal state she moved along, surrounded and followed by all the nobility and chivalry of France, amid the acclamations of an admiring and excited people, having just pledged herself to one whose feelings were as little interested in the compact as her own.

The bridal festivities lasted throughout three entire days; and never had such an excess of luxury and magnificence been displayed at the French court. Towards the Protestants, the bearing both of Charles IX. and his mother was so courteous, frank, and conciliating, that the most distrustful gradually threw off their misgivings, and vied with the Catholic nobles both in gallantry and splendour; and meanwhile Catherine, the King, the Duke d'Anjou, and the Guises were busied in organising the frightful tragedy of St. Bartholomew!

The young Queen of Navarre had scrupulously been left in ignorance of a plot which involved the life of her bridegroom as well as those of his co-religionists; nor was she aware of the catastrophe which had been organised until Paris was already one vast shambles. Startled from her sleep at the dead of night, and hurriedly informed of the nature of the frightful cries that had broken her rest, she at once sprang from her bed, and throwing on a mantle, forced her way to

* Prus. Hist. des Reines et Régentes de France, vol. ii, p. 4.

the closet of her royal brother; where, sinking on her knees, she earnestly implored the lives of Henry's Protestant attendants; but for a time Charles was obdurate; nor was it until after he had reluctantly yielded to her prayers that she recognised, with an involuntary cry of joy, the figure of her husband, who stood in the deep bay of a window with his cousin, M. de Condé.*

By one of those caprices to which he was subject, the King had refused to sacrifice either of these princes; and he had accordingly summoned them to his presence, where he had offered them the alternative of an instant abjuration of their heresy.

Shrieks and groans already resounded on all sides; the groans of strong men, struck down unarmed and defenceless, and the shrieks of women struggling with their murderers; while through all, and above all, boomed out the deep-toned bells of the metropolitan churches—one long burial-peal; and amid this ghastly diapason it was the pleasure of the tiger-hearted Charles to accept the reluctant and informal recantation of his two horror-stricken victims; after which he compelled

* Henry de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, first prince of the blood, and Grand Master of France, was born in 1552, and succeeded his father, the Count Louis, who was killed at the battle of Jarnac, on the 13th of May, 1569, in the command of the Protestant party, conjointly with the King of Navarre (Henry IV.) He made a levy of foreign troops, in 1575, distinguished himself at Coutras, in 1587, and died by poison the following year, at St. Jean d'Angely.

them without remorse to the agony of seeing their friends and followers butchered before their eyes.

Enraged by what they denounced as the weak and impolitic clemency of the King, in having thus shielded two of the most powerful leaders of the adverse faction, Catherine de Medicis and the Guises, having first wreaked their vengeance upon the corpse of the brave and veteran de Coligny which they induced the King to dishonour himself by subjecting to the most ignominious treatment, next endeavoured to alienate Marguerite from her husband, and to induce her to solicit a divorce. It had formed no part of the Queen-mother's intention that the Princess should remain fettered by the bonds which she had herself wreathed about her; nor could she brook that after having accomplished a *coup-de-main* which had excited the indignation of half Europe, Henry of Navarre should be indebted for an impunity which counteracted all her views, to the alliance which he had formed with her own family. Marguerite, however, resolutely refused to lend herself to this new treachery, declaring that as her husband had abjured his heresy, she had no plea to advance in justification of so flagrant an act of perfidy; nor could the expostulations of her mother produce any change in her resolve.

It is probable that the perfect freedom of action, for which she was indebted to the indifference of her young bridegroom, had great influence in prompting this reply; and that the crown which had so recently been

placed upon her brow had at the same time flattered her ambition; while the frightful carnage of which she had just been a witness, might well cause her to shrink from the probable repetition of so hideous a catastrophe. Be her motives what they might, however, neither threats nor entreaties could shake the resolution of the Princess; and she was supported in her opposition by her favourite brother, the Duke d'Alençon, who had secretly attached himself to the cause of the Protestant princes.

This was another source of uneasiness to the Queen-mother, who apprehended, from the pertinacity with which Marguerite clung to her husband, that she would exert all her influence to effect an understanding between the two brothers-in-law which could not fail to prove fatal to the interests of the Duke d'Anjou, who, in the event of the decease of Charles IX., was the rightful heir to the throne. Nor was that decease a mere matter of idle speculation, for the health of the King, always feeble and uncertain, had failed more than ever since the fatal night of the 24th of August; and he had even confessed to Ambroise Paré,* his

* Ambroise Paré was born at Laval (Mayenne), in 1509. He commenced his public career as surgeon of the infantry-general Réné de Montejean; and on his return to France, having taken his degrees at the College of St. Edme, he was elected provost of the Corporation of Surgeons. In 1552, Henry II. gave him the appointment of body-surgeon to the King, a post which he continued to fill under Francis II., Charles IX., and Henry III. Charles IX., whose life he saved, when he had nearly fallen a victim to the want of skill of his physician Portail, who, in

body-surgeon, that his dreams were haunted by the spectres of his victims, and that he consequently shrank from the sleep which was so essential to his existence. The Duke d'Anjou meanwhile was absent at the siege of Rochelle, while his brother, d'Alençon, was about the person of the dying monarch, and had made himself eminently popular among the citizens of Paris. The crisis was an alarming one; but it was still destined to appear even more perilous, for, to the consternation of Catherine, intelligence at this period reached the court, that the Polish nation had elected the Duke d'Anjou as their King, and that their ambassadors were about to visit France in order to tender him the crown. In vain did she represent to Charles the impolicy of suffering a warlike prince like Henry d'Anjou to abandon his country for a foreign throne; and urge him to replace the elder by the younger brother, alleging that so long as the Polish people could see a prince of the blood-royal of France at the head of their nation, they would care little whether he were called Henry or Francis; the King refused to countenance such a substitution. He had long been jealous of the military renown of the Duke d'Anjou; while he was also perfectly aware of the anxiety with which both the Queen-mother

opening a vein, had inflicted a deep and dangerous wound in his arm, repaid the benefit by concealing him in his own chamber during the massacre of St. Batholomew. Paré was a zealous Calvinist. He died in 1590. His published works consist of one folio volume, divided into twenty-eight books.

and the Prince himself looked forward to his own death, in order that Henry might succeed him; and he consequently issued a command that the sovereign-elect should immediately repair to Paris, to receive at the hands of the foreign delegates the crown which they were about to offer to him.

The summons was obeyed. The ambassadors, who duly arrived, were magnificently received; Henry d'Anjou was declared King of Poland; and, finally, he found himself compelled to depart for his own kingdom. Unfortunately for Marguerite, she had not sufficient self-control to conceal the joy with which she saw the immediate succession to the French throne thus transferred to her favourite brother; and her evident delight so exasperated the Queen-mother, that she communicated to Charles the suspicions which she herself entertained of the treachery of the Princess; but the King, worn down by both physical and mental suffering, treated her warnings with indifference, and she was consequently compelled to await with patience the progress of events.

The death of the French monarch, which shortly afterwards took place, and the accession of Henry d'Anjou, whom a timely warning had enabled to abandon the crown of Poland for that of France, for a time diverted the attention of Catherine from the suspected machinations of her daughter; when, as if to convince her of her injustice, she suddenly received secret intelligence from the young Queen of Navarre, that the Duke d'Alençon had

entered into a new league with the Bourbon princes. It is difficult to account for the motive which led Marguerite to make this revelation, when her extraordinary affection for her brother, and the anxiety which she had universally exhibited for the safety of her husband, are remembered; thus much, however, is certain, that she did not betray the conspiracy (which had been revealed to her by a Lutheran gentleman whom she had saved during the massacre of St. Bartholomew), until she had exacted a pledge that the lives of all who were involved in it should be spared. In her anxiety to secure the secret, the Queen-mother, on her side, gave a solemn promise to that effect, and she redeemed her word; while from the immediate precautions which she caused to be taken the plot was necessarily annihilated.

The Princess had, however, by the knowledge which she thus displayed of the movements of the Huguenot party, only increased the suspicions both of the Queen-mother and her son; and the court of France became ere long so distasteful to Henry of Navarre, from the constant affronts to which he was subjected, and the undisguised *surveillance* which fettered all his movements, that he resolved to effect his escape from Paris; an example in which he was imitated by the Duke d'Alençon and the Prince de Condé, the former of whom retired to Champagne, and the latter to one of his estates; and with both of whom he shortly afterwards entered into a formidable league.

Henry III., exasperated by the departure of the three

princes, declared his determination to revenge the affront upon Marguerite, who had not been enabled to accompany her husband; but the representations of the Queen-mother induced him to forego this ungenerous project, and he was driven to satiate his thirst for vengeance upon her favourite attendant, Mademoiselle de Torigni,* of whose services he had already deprived her, on the pretext that so young a Princess should not be permitted to retain about her person such persons as were likely to exert an undue influence over her mind, and to possess themselves of her secrets. In the first paroxysm of his rage, he even sentenced this lady to be drowned; nor is it doubtful that this iniquitous and unfounded sentence would have been really carried into effect, had not the unfortunate woman succeeded in making her escape through the agency of two individuals who were about to rejoin the Duke d'Alençon, and who conducted her safely to Champagne.†

One of the first acts of Henry of Navarre on reaching his own dominions had been to protest against the enforced abjuration to which he was compelled on the fatal night of St. Bartholomew, and to evince his sincerity by resuming the practices of the reformed faith;

* Gillone Goyon, dite de Matignon, demoiselle de Torigni, was the daughter of Jacques de Matignon, Marshal of France, and of Françoise de Daillon, who was subsequently married to Pierre de Harcourt, Seigneur de Beuvron.

† Lévi Alvarès, Hist. Clas. des Reines et Régentes de France, p. 185.

a recantation which so exasperated the French king that he made Marguerite a close prisoner in her own apartments, under the pretext that she was leagued with the enemies of the state against the church and throne of her ancestors. Nor would he listen to her entreaties that she might be permitted to follow her husband, declaring that "she should not live with a heretic;" and thus her days passed on in a gloomy and cheerless monotony, ill-suited to her excitable temperament and splendid tastes. Meanwhile, the Duke d'Alençon, weary of his voluntary exile, and hopeless of any successful result to the disaffection in which he had so long indulged, became anxious to effect a reconciliation with the King; and for this purpose he addressed himself to Marguerite, to whom he explained the conditions upon which he was willing to return to his allegiance, giving her full power to treat in his name. Henry III., who, on his side, was no less desirous to detach his brother from the Protestant cause, acceded to all his demands, among which was the immediate liberation of the Princess; and thus she at length found herself enabled to quit her regal prison, and to rejoin her royal husband at Bearn.

During the space of five years the ill-assorted couple maintained at least a semblance of harmony, for each apparently regarded very philosophically those delicate questions which occasionally conduce to considerable discord in married life. The personal habits of Henry, combined with his sense of gratitude to his wife for her

refusal to abandon him to the virulence of her mother's hatred, induced him to close his eyes to her moral delinquencies; while Marguerite, in her turn, with equal complacency, affected a like ignorance as regarded the pursuits of her husband; and thus the little court of Pau, where they had established their residence, rendered attractive by the frank urbanity of the sovereign, and the grace and intellect of the young Queen, became as brilliant and as dissipated as even the daughter of Catherine de Medicis herself could desire. Poets sang her praise, under the name of Urania;* flatterers sought her smiles by likening her to the Goddesses of Love and Beauty, and she lived in a perpetual atmosphere of pleasure and adulation.

The marriage-portion of Marguerite had consisted of the two provinces of the Agénois and the Quercy, which had been ceded to her with all their royal prerogatives; but even after this accession of revenue, the resources of Henry of Navarre did not exceed those of a private gentleman, amounting, in fact, only to a hundred and forty thousand livres, or about six thousand pounds yearly. The ancient kingdom of Navarre, which had once extended from the frontier of France to the banks of the Ebro, and of which Pampeluna had been the capital, shorn of its dimensions by Ferdinand the Catholic at the commencement of the sixteenth century, and incorporated with the Spanish

* Dupleix, Hist. de Louis XIII., p. 53.

monarchy, now consisted only of a portion of Lower Navarre, and the principality of Bearn, thus leaving to Henry little of sovereignty save the title. The duchy of Albret in Gascony, which he inherited from his great-grandfather, and that of Vendôme, his appanage as a prince of the blood-royal of France, consequently formed no inconsiderable portion of his territory: while the title of Governor of Guienne, which he still retained, was a merely nominal dignity whence he derived neither income nor influence; and so unpopular was he in the province that the citizens of Bordeaux refused to admit him within their gates.

Nevertheless, the young monarch who held his court alternately at Pau and at Nerac, the capital of the duchy of Albret, expended annually upon his household and establishment nearly twelve thousand pounds, and that at a period when, according to the evidence of Sully, "the whole court could not have furnished forty thousand livres;"* yet so inadequately were those about him remunerated, that Sully himself, in his joint capacity of councillor of state and chamberlain, received only two thousand annual livres, or ninety pounds sterling. This royal penury did not, however, depress the spirits of the frank and free-hearted King, who eagerly entered into every species of gaiety and amusement. Jousts, masques, and ballets, succeeded each other with a rapidity which left no time for anxiety or *ennui;* and

* Sully, Mémoires, vol. i, p. 45.

Marguerite has bequeathed to us in her Memoirs so graphic a picture of the royal circle in 1579-80, that we cannot resist its transcription. "We passed the greater portion of our time at Nerac;" she says, "where the court was so brilliant that we had no reason to envy that of France. The sole subject of regret was that the principal number of the nobles and gentlemen were Huguenots; but the subject of religion was never mentioned; the King my husband, accompanied by his sister,* attending their own devotions, while I and my suite heard mass in a chapel in the park. When the several services were concluded, we again assembled in a garden ornamented with avenues of laurels and cypresses, upon the bank of the river; and in the afternoon and evening a ballet was performed."†

It is much to be regretted that the royal biographer follows up this pleasing picture by avowals of her own profligacy, and complacent comments upon the indulgence and generosity with which she lent herself to the vices of her husband.

The temporary calm was not, however, fated to endure. Marguerite, even while she indulged in the most unblushing licentiousness, was, as we have already

* Catherine de Bourbon, Princess of Navarre, and sister of Henry IV., was born at Paris, in 1558. After his accession to the throne of France, Henry gave her in marriage to Henry of Lorraine, Duke de Bar. She refused to change her religion, even when her brother had done so, and died without issue, in 1604, at Nancy.

† Mémoires de Marguerite, pp. 176, 177.

stated, devoted to the observances of her religion; and on her first arrival at Pau she had requested that a chapel might be provided, in which the services of her church could be performed. This was a concession which Henry of Navarre was neither willing, nor indeed able, to make; the inhabitants of the city being all rigid reformers, who had not yet forgiven the young monarch either his enforced renunciation of their faith, or his Catholic marriage; and accordingly the Queen had been compelled to avail herself of a small oratory in the castle which would not contain more than six or eight persons; while so anxious was the King not to exasperate the good citizens, that no individual was permitted to accompany her to the chapel save the immediate members of her household, and the drawbridge was always raised until she had returned to her own apartments.

Thus, the arrival of Marguerite in the country, which had raised the hopes of the Catholic portion of the population, by no means tended to improve their position; and for a time her co-religionists, disheartened by so signal a disappointment, made no effort to resist the orders of the King; but on the day of Pentecost, 1579, a few zealous devotees, who had by some means introduced themselves secretly into the castle, followed the Queen to her oratory, where they were arrested by Dupin the royal secretary, very roughly treated in the presence of Marguerite herself, and only released on the payment of a heavy fine.

Indignant at the disrespect which had been shown to

her, the Princess at once proceeded to the apartment of her husband, where she complained with emphatic bitterness of the insolence of his favourite; and she had scarcely began to acquaint him with the details of the affair when Dupin entered unannounced, and in the most intemperate manner commented on her breach of good-faith, in having wilfully abused the forbearance of the sovereign and his Protestant subjects.

It was not without some difficulty that Henry succeeded in arresting this indecent flow of words; when, rebuking Dupin for his want of discretion and self-control, he commanded him immediately to crave the pardon of the Queen for his ill-advised interference, and the want of deference of which he had been guilty towards her royal person; but Marguerite refused to listen to any apology, and haughtily and resolutely demanded the instant dismissal of the delinquent. In vain did Henry expostulate, declaring that he could not dispense with the services of so old and devoted a servant; the Princess was inexorable, and the over-zealous secretary received orders to leave the court. Marguerite, however, purchased this triumph dearly, as the King resented with a bitterness unusual to him the exhibition of authority in which she had indulged; and when she subsequently urged him to punish those who had acted under the orders of the exiled secretary, he boldly and positively refused to give her any further satisfaction, alleging that her want of consideration towards himself left him at equal liberty to disregard her own wishes.

Angry and irritated, Marguerite lost no time in acquainting her family with the affront which she had experienced; and Catherine de Medicis, who believed that she had now found a pretext sufficiently plausible to separate the young Queen from her husband, skilfully envenomed the already rankling wound, not only by awakening the religious scruples of her daughter, but also by reminding her that she had been subjected to insult from a petty follower of a petty court; and, finally, she urged her to assert her dignity by an immediate return to France.

Marguerite, whom the King had not made a single effort to conciliate, obeyed without reluctance; and, in the year 1582, she left Navarre, and on her arrival in Paris took possession of her old apartments in the Louvre. She was received with great cordiality by Henry III., who trusted that her residence in France might induce her husband ere long to follow her; but he soon discovered that not even the warmth of his welcome could cause her to forget the past; and that, under his own royal roof, she was secretly intriguing with the Duke d'Alençon, who was once more in open revolt against him.

For a time, although thoroughly informed that such was the fact, his emissaries were unable to produce any tangible proof of the validity of their accusations; but at length, rendered bold by impunity, Marguerite was so imprudent as to cause the arrest of a royal courier, charged with an autograph letter of two entire sheets

from the King to his favourite the Duke de Joyeuse* who was then on a mission at Rome, for the purpose of forwarding his despatches to the rebel Duke; when the unfortunate messenger, who found himself suddenly attacked by four men in masks, made so desperate an effort to save the packet with which he had been intrusted, that the *sbirri* of the Princess, who had anticipated an easy triumph, became so much exasperated, that they stabbed him on the spot.

This occurrence no sooner reached the ears of Henry III., than he sent to desire the presence of his sister; when, utterly regardless of the fact that they were not alone, he so far forgot his own dignity as to overwhelm her with the coarsest and most cutting reproaches; and not satisfied with expatiating upon the treachery of which she had been guilty towards himself, he passed in review the whole of her ill-spent life; accusing her, among other enormities, of the birth of an illegitimate son,† and terminated his invectives by

* Anne, Duke de Joyeuse, Admiral and Peer of France, first gentleman of the bed-chamber, and Governor of Normandy, was born in 1561. He was one of the *mignons* of Henry III., who, in 1582, gave him in marriage Marguerite de Lorraine, the sister of the Queen Louise de Vaudemont. He commanded the troops in Guienne against the Huguenots, where he exercised the greatest cruelties; and having been defeated at the battle of Coutras, in 1587, he was put to death by the conquerors.

† This child, called by Bassompierre *le Père Archange*, and by Dupleix *le Père Ange*, was the son of Jacques de Harlay de Chanvallon, known at court as "the handsome Chanvallon;" and

commanding her instantly "to quit Paris, and rid the court of her presence."*

On the morrow Marguerite accordingly left the capital with even less state than she had entered it, for she had neither suite nor equipage, and was accompanied only by Madame de Duras and Mademoiselle de Béthune, her two favourite attendants. She was not, however, suffered to depart even thus without impediment, for she had only travelled a few leagues when, between Saint-Cler and Palaiseau, her litter was stopped by a captain of the royal guard, at the head of a troop of harquebusiers: she was compelled to remove her mask; and her companions, after having been subjected to great discourtesy, were finally conveyed as prisoners to the Abbey of Ferrières, near Montargis, where they underwent an examination, at which the King himself presided,† and wherein facts were elicited that were fatal to the character of their mistress. Their replies were then reduced to writing; and Marguerite, who had been detained for this express purpose, was compelled by her inexorable brother to affix her signature to the disgraceful document; when, after she had been subjected to this new indignity, the daughter of Catherine de

was the individual who, as the confessor of the Marquise de Verneuil, became one of the most active agents in the conspiracy which was formed against Henry IV. and the French princes.

* Dreux du Radier, vol. v, p. 176.

† Mezeray, vol iii, p. 546. Varillas, Histoire de Henri III., Book VII.

Medicis was at length permitted to pursue her journey; but she was compelled to do so alone, as her two attendants were forbidden to bear her company.

She had no sooner left Ferrières than Henry III. dispatched one of the valets of his wardrobe to St. Foix, where the King of Navarre was for the moment sojourning, with an autograph letter, in which he informed him that he had considered it expedient to dismiss from the service of his royal sister both Madame de Duras and Mademoiselle de Béthune, having discovered that they were leading the most dissolute and scandalous lives, and were "*pernicious vermin*" who could not be permitted to remain about the person of a princess of her rank.

Thus ignominiously driven from the court of France, Marguerite, who had no resource save in the indulgence of her husband, travelled with the greatest speed to Nerac where he was then residing, in the hope that she might be enabled by her representations to induce him to espouse her cause against her brother; but although, in order to preserve appearances, Henry received her courteously, and even listened with exemplary patience to her impassioned relation of the indignities to which she had been subjected, the coldness of his deportment, and the stern tone in which he informed her that he would give the necessary orders for a separate residence to be prepared for her accommodation, as he could never again receive her under his own roof, or accord to her the honour and consideration due to a wife, con-

vinced her that she had nothing more to hope from his forbearance..

Even while he thus resented his own wrongs, however, Henry of Navarre no sooner comprehended that Marguerite had been personally exposed to insults which had affected his honour as her consort, than he dispatched a messenger to the French King at Lyons, "to entreat him to explain the cause of these affronts, and to advise him, *as a good master*, how he had better act."* But this somewhat servile proceeding produced no adequate result, as his envoy received only ambiguous answers; and all he could accomplish was to extort a promise from Henry III. that on his return to Paris he would discuss the affair with the Queen-mother and the Duke d'Alençon.

Unaware of the negociation which was thus opened, Marguerite had, as we have said, lost all confidence in her own influence over her husband; and accordingly, without giving any intimation of her design, she left Nerac, and retired to Agen, one of her dower-cities, where she established herself in the castle; but her unbridled depravity of conduct, combined with the extortions of Madame de Duras, her friend and *confidante*, by whom she had been rejoined, soon rendered her odious to the inhabitants.

In vain did she declare that the bull of excommuni-

* D'Aubigny, Hist. vol. ii, book v, ch. iii (1583). Sancy, Confession, ch. vii, p. 447. Duplessis-Mornay.

cation which Sixtus V. had recently fulminated against the King of Navarre had been the cause of her retiring from his court, her conscience not permitting her to share the roof of a prince under the ban of the church.* The Agenese, although Catholics and leagued against her husband, evinced towards herself a disaffection so threatening that her position was rapidly becoming untenable, when the city was stormed and taken by the Maréchal de Matignon† in the name of Henry III.‡

Convinced that the capture of her own person was the sole motive of this unprovoked assault, the fugitive Queen had once more recourse to flight; and her eagerness to escape the power of the French king was so great that she left the city seated on a pillion behind a gentleman of her suite named Lignerac, while Madame de Duras followed in like manner; and thus she travelled four-and-twenty leagues in the short space

* Duplessis-Mornay, Mém., p. 205.

† Jacques Govon de Matignon, Prince de Mortagne, was the representative of a family of Brittany which traced its descent from the thirteenth century, and had been established in Normandy towards the middle of the fifteenth. Born at Lonray, in 1526, he was appointed Lieutenant-General of Normandy in 1559, where he made himself conspicuous by his persecution of the Huguenots. Henry III. recompensed his services, in 1579, by the *bâton* of a maréchal, and the collar of his Order. He subsequently became commander-in-chief of the army in Picardy, then lieutenant-general of Guienne, and, finally, Governor of that province. He died in 1597.

‡ Lévi Alvarès, p. 187.

of two days, attended by such of the members of her little household as were enabled to keep pace with her.

The fortress of Carlat in the mountains of Auvergne offered to her, as she believed, a safe asylum; but although the governor, who was the brother of M. de Lignerac, received her with respect, and promised her his protection, the enmity of Henry III. pursued her even to this obscure place of exile.

At this period even the high spirit of Marguerite de Valois was nearly subdued, for she no longer knew in what direction to turn for safety. She had become contemptible in the eyes of her husband, she was deserted by her mother, hated by her brother, despised by her co-religionists from the licentiousness of her life, and detested by the Protestants as the cause, however innocently, of the fatal massacre of their friends and leaders. The memory of the martyred Coligny was ever accompanied by a curse on Marguerite; and thus she was an outcast from all creeds and all parties. Still, however, confident in the good-faith of the Governor of Carlat, she assumed at least a semblance of tranquillity, and trusted that she should be enabled to remain for a time unmolested; but it was not long ere she ascertained that the inhabitants of the town, like those of Agen, were hostile to her interests, and that they had even resolved to deliver her up to the French king.

Under these circumstances, she had no alternative

save to become once more a fugitive; and having, with considerable difficulty, succeeded in making her escape beyond the walls, she began to indulge a hope that she should yet baffle the devices of her enemy; she was soon, however, fated to be undeceived, for she had travelled only a few leagues when she was overtaken and captured by the Marquis de Canillac,* who conveyed her to the fortress of Usson.† As she passed the drawbridge, Marguerite recognised at a glance that there was no hope of evasion from this new and impregnable prison, save through the agency of her gaoler; and she accordingly lost no time in exerting all her blandishments to captivate his reason. Although she had now attained her thirty-fifth year, neither time, anxiety, hardship, nor even the baneful indulgence of her misguided passions, had yet robbed her of her extraordinary beauty; and it is consequently scarcely surprising that ere long the gallant soldier to whose custody she was confided, surrendered at discretion, and laid at her feet, not only his heart, but also the keys of her prison-house.

"Poor man!" enthusiastically exclaims Brantôme, her friend and correspondent; "what did he expect to do? Did he think to retain as a prisoner her who, by her eyes and her lovely countenance, could hold in her

* Governor of Auvergne.

† The fortress of Usson, which had been a state prison under Louis XI., was demolished by Louis XIII., in 1634.

chains and bonds all the rest of the world like galley-slaves ?"*

Certain it is, that if the brave but susceptible marquis ever contemplated such a result, he was destined to prove the fallacy of his hopes; for so totally was he subjugated by the fascinations of the captive Queen, that he even abandoned to her the command of the fortress, which thenceforward acknowledged no authority save her own.

Marguerite had scarcely resided a year at Usson when the death of the Duke d'Alençon deprived her of the last friend whom she possessed on earth; and not even the security that she derived from the impregnability of the fortress in which she had found an asylum, could preserve her from great and severe suffering. The castle, with its triple ramparts, its wide moat, and its iron portcullis, might indeed defy all human enemies, but it could not exclude famine; and during her sojourn within its walls, which extended over a period of two-and-twenty years, she was compelled to pawn her jewels, and to melt down her plate, in order to provide food for the famishing garrison; while, so utterly destitute did she ultimately become, that she found herself driven to appeal to the generosity of Elizabeth of Austria, the widow of her brother, Charles IX., who thenceforward supplied her necessities.

In the year 1589, Henry of Navarre ascended the

* Brantôme, Dames Illustres, Marguerite de France, Reine de Navarre, Dis. v, p. 275.

throne of France, having previously, for the second time, embraced the Catholic faith;* but for a while the *liaisons* which he found it so facile to form at the court, and his continued affection for the Countess de Guiche,† together with the internal disturbances and foreign wars which had convulsed the early years of his reign, so thoroughly engrossed his attention, that he had made no attempt to separate himself from his erring and exiled wife; nor was it until 1598, when the Edict of Nantes had ensured a lasting and certain peace to the Huguenots: and that *la belle Gabrielle*‡ had re-

* "There are three things," Henry IV. was wont to say, "that the world will not believe, and yet they are certainly true: that the Queen of England (Elizabeth) died a maid; that the Archduke (Albert, Cardinal and Archduke of Austria) is a great captain; and that the King of France is a very good Catholic."—*L'Etoile, Journ. de Henry IV.*, vol. i, p. 233.

† Diane d'Andouins, Vicomtesse de Louvigni, dame de l'Escun, was the only daughter of Paul, Viscount de Louvigni, Seigneur de l'Escun, and of Marguerite de Cauna. While yet a mere girl, she became the wife of Philibert de Grammont, Count de Guiche, Governor of Bayonne, and Seneschal of Bearn. The passion of Henry IV. for this lady was so great, that he declared his intention of obtaining a divorce from Marguerite de Valois, for the purpose of making her his wife; a project from which he was dissuaded by d'Aubigny, who represented that the contempt which could not fail to be felt by the French for a monarch who had degraded himself by an alliance with his mistress, would inevitably deprive him of the throne in the event of the death of Henry III. and the Duke d'Alençon.

‡ Gabrielle d'Estrées was the daughter of Antoine d'Estrées, fourth of the name, Governor, Seneschal, and first Baron of Bou-

placed Madame de Guiche, and by making him the father of two sons, had induced him to contemplate (as he had done in a previous case with her predecessor) her elevation to the throne, that he became really anxious to liberate himself from the trammels of his ill-omened marriage.

Having ascertained that the Duke de Bouillón,* not-

lonnois, Viscount of Soissons and Bersy, Marquis of Cœuvres, knight of the Orders of the King, Governor of La Fère, Paris, and the Isle of France; and of Françoise Babou, second daughter of Jean, Seigneur de la Bourdaisière, and of Françoise Robertet. She married at an early age, by the desire of her father, who was anxious to protect her from the assiduities of the King, Nicolas d'Armeval, Seigneur de Liancourt, who was alike in birth, in person, and in fortune, unworthy of her hand. This ill-assorted union produced the very result which it was intended to avert, for Henry found means to separate the young couple immediately after their marriage, and to attach Gabrielle to the court, where she soon became the declared favourite. On the birth of her first child (Cæsar, Duke de Vendôme), Madame de Liancourt abandoned the name of her husband from whom she obtained a divorce, and assumed that of Marquise de Monceaux, which she derived from an estate presented to her on that occasion by the King; and on the legitimation of her son in January, 1595, she already aspired to the throne, and formed a party, headed by M. de Sillery, by whom her pretensions were encouraged. She was subsequently created Duchesse de Beaufort, and became the mother of Catherine-Henriette, married to the Duke d'Elbœuf, and of Alexandre de Vendôme, Grand Prior of France, who were likewise legitimated. She died in child-birth, but not without suspicion of poison, on Easter Eve, in the year 1599.

* Henri de la Tour, Vicomte de Turenne, Duke de Bouillon, Peer and Marshal of France.

withstanding the concessions which he had made to the Protestant party, had been recently engaged, in conjunction with d'Aubigny* and other zealous reformers, in endeavouring to create renewed disaffection among the Huguenots, Henry resolved to visit Brittany, and personally to express to the Duke his indignation and displeasure.

On his arrival at Rennes, where M. de Bouillon was confined to his bed by a violent attack of gout, the King accordingly proceeded to his residence; where, after having expressed his regret at the state of suffering in which he found him, he ordered all the attendants to withdraw, and seating himself near the pillow of the invalid, desired him to listen without remark or interruption to all that he was about to say. He then reproached him in the most indignant terms with his continual and active efforts to disturb the peace of the

* Théodore Agrippa d'Aubigny was the son of Jean d'Aubigny, Seigneur de Brie, in Xaintonge, and of Catherine de Lestang; and was born on the 8th of February, 1550. At the age of six years he read with equal facility the Latin, Greek, and Hebrew languages; and eighteen months afterwards translated the "Crito" of Plato. The persecutions of the Huguenots, which he witnessed in his early youth, and the solemn injunctions of his father to revenge their wrongs, rendered him one of the most zealous and uncompromising reformers under Henry IV. He died at Geneva, on the 29th of April, 1630, aged eighty years, and was buried in the cloisters of St. Pierre. D'Aubigny left behind him not only his own memoirs, which are admirably and truthfully written, but also the biting satire known as the "Aventures du Baron de Fœneste," and the still more celebrated "Confession de Sancy."

kingdom, recapitulating every act, and almost every word, of his astonished and embarrassed listener, with an accuracy which left no opportunity for denial; and, finally, he advised him to be warned in time, and, if he valued his own safety, to adopt a perfectly opposite line of conduct; assuring him, in conclusion, that should he persist in his present contumacy, he should himself take measures, as his sovereign and his master, to render him incapable of working further mischief.

The bewildered Duke would have replied, but he was instantly silenced by an imperious gesture from the King; who, rising from his seat, left the chamber in silence.

The presence of Henry IV. in Brittany was the signal for festivity and rejoicing, and all that was fair and noble in the province was soon collected at Rennes in honour of his arrival; but despite these demonstrations of affection and respect, his watchful and anxious minister, the Duke de Sully, remarked that he occasionally gave way to fits of absence, and even of melancholy, which were quite unusual to him, and which consequently excited the alarm of the zealous Duke. He had, moreover, several times desired M. de Sully's attendance in a manner which induced him to believe that the King had something of importance to communicate, but the interviews had successively terminated without any such result; until, on one occasion, a few days after his interview with the Duke de Bouillon, Henry once more beckoned him to his side, and turning

into a large garden which was attached to his residence, he there wreathed his fingers in those of the minister, as was his constant habit, and drawing him into a retired walk, commenced the conversation by relating in detail all that had passed between himself and the ducal rebel.* He then digressed to recent political measures, and expressed himself strongly upon the advantages which tranquillity at home, as well as peace abroad, must insure to the kingdom; after which, as if by some process of mental retrogression, he became suddenly more gloomy in his discourse; and observed, as if despite himself, that although he would struggle even to the end of his existence to secure these national advantages, he nevertheless felt that as the Queen had given him no son, all his endeavours must prove fruitless; since the contention which would necessarily arise between M. de Condé and the other princes of the blood, when the important subject of the succession gave a free and sufficient motive for their jealousy, could not fail to renew the civil anarchy which he had been so anxious to terminate. He then, after a moment's silence, referred to the desire which had been formally expressed to him by the Parliament of Paris, that he should separate himself from Marguerite de Valois, and unite himself with some other princess who might give a Dauphin to France, and thus transmit to a son of his own line the crown which he now wore.

Sully, who was no less desirous than himself to ensure the prosperity of the nation to which he had devoted

all the energies of his powerful and active mind, did not hesitate to suggest the expediency of his Majesty's immediate compliance with the prayer of his subjects; and entreat him in his turn to obtain a divorce, which by leaving him free, would enable him to make a happier choice; and he even assured the anxious monarch that he had already taken steps to ascertain that the Archbishop d'Urbino, and the Pope himself (who was fully aware of the importance of maintaining the peace of Europe, which must necessarily be endangered by a renewal of the intestine troubles in France,) would both readily facilitate by every means in their power so politic and so desirable a measure.

Henry urged for a time his disinclination to contract a second marriage, alleging that his first had proved so unfortunate in every way, that he was reluctant to rivet anew the chain which had been so rudely riven asunder; but the unflinching minister did not fail to remind him that much as he owed to himself, he still owed even more to a people who had faith in his wisdom and generosity; and the frank-hearted King suffered himself, although with evident distaste, to be ultimately convinced.

He then began to pass in review all the marriageable princesses who were eligible to share his throne, but to each in succession he attached some objection which tended to weaken her claim. After what he had already undergone, as he declared, there were few women, and still fewer women of royal blood, to whom he would

willingly a second time confide his chance of happiness. "In order not to encounter once more the same disappointment and displeasure;" he said at length; "I must find in the next woman whom I may marry seven qualities with which I cannot dispense. She must be handsome, prudent, gentle, intellectual, fruitful, wealthy, and of high extraction; and thus I do not know a single Princess in Europe calculated to satisfy my idea of feminine perfection."

Then, after a pause during which the minister remained silent, he added, with some inconsistency: "I would readily put up with the Spanish Infanta,* despite both her age and her ugliness, did I espouse the Low Countries in her person; neither would I refuse the Princess Arabella of England,† if, as it is alleged, the crown of that country really belonged to her, or even had she been declared heiress presumptive; but we cannot reasonably anticipate either contingency. I have heard also of several German princesses whose names I have forgotten, but I have no taste for the women of that country; besides which, it is on record that a German queen‡ nearly proved the ruin of the

* Isabella Clara Eugenia, Infanta of Spain, was the second daughter of Philip II. She was the Governante of the Low Countries; and although no longer either young or handsome, she possessed an extraordinary influence over her royal father, who was tenderly attached to her.

† Arabella Stuart, daughter of Charles, Earl of Lennox, the grandson of Margaret of Scotland, sister to Henry VIII.

‡ Isabeau de Bavière, Queen of Charles VI.

French nation; and thus they inspire me only with disgust."

Still Sully listened without reply, the King having commenced his confidence by assuming a position which rendered all argument worse than idle.

"They have talked to me likewise;" resumed Henry more hurriedly, as disconcerted and annoyed by the expressive silence of his companion he began to walk more rapidly along the shaded path in which this conference took place; "they have talked to me of the sisters of Prince Maurice;* but not only are they Huguenots, a fact which could not fail to give umbrage at the court of Rome, but I have also heard reports that would render me averse to their alliance. Then the Duke of Florence has a niece,† who is stated to be tolerably handsome, but she comes of one of the pettiest principalities of Christendom; and not more than sixty or eighty years ago her ancestors were merely the chief citizens of the town of which their successors are now the sovereigns; and, moreover, she is a daughter of the same race as Catherine de Medicis, who has been alike my own enemy and that of France."

Once more the King paused for breath, and glanced anxiously towards his minister, but Sully was inex-

* Maurice of Nassau, Prince of Orange, second son of William, and of Anne, the daughter of Maurice, Elector of Saxony.

† Marie de Medicis was the daughter of Francis, Grand Duke of Tuscany, and of Jane, Archduchess of Austria, and Queen of Hungary, daughter of the Emperor Ferdinand.

orable, and continued to listen respectfully and attentively without uttering a syllable.

"So much for the foreign princesses;" continued Henry with some irritation, when he found that his listener had resolved not to assist him either by word or gesture; "at least, I know of no others. And now for our own. There is my niece, Mademoiselle de Guise;* and she is one of those whom I should prefer, despite the naughty tales that are told of her, for I place no faith in them; but she is too much devoted to the interests of her house, and I have reason to dread the restless ambition of her brothers."

The Princesses of Mayenne,† of Aumale,‡ and of

* Louise-Marguerite de Lorraine was the daughter of Henri, Duke de Guise, surnamed *le Balafré*, and of Catherine of Clèves, subsequently Duchess de Nemours. She was celebrated alike for her extreme beauty, her brilliant wit, and her great intellect. She wrote admirably for that age, and was the author of the "Histoire des Amours du Grand Alcandre," and of some "Court Chronicles," which she published under the patronymic of Dupilaust. Mademoiselle de Guise married François, Prince de Conti, son of the celebrated Louis, Prince de Condé, who was killed at Jarnac.

† Catherine de Lorraine, daughter of Charles, Duke de Mayenne, and of Henriette de Savoie-Villars, who became in February, 1599, the wife of Charles de Gonzagua, Duke de Nevers, and subsequently Duke of Mantua. She died on the 8th of March, 1618, at the age of thirty-three years; and was consequently, at the period referred to in the text, only seventeen years old.

‡ Anne, daughter and heiress of Charles, last Duke d'Aumale, by whom the duchy was transferred to the house of Savoy.

Longueville,* were next the subject of the royal comments; but they were all either too fair or too dark, too old or too plain; nor were Mesdemoiselles de Rohan,† de Luxembourg,‡ or de Guiménée§ more fortunate; the first was a Calvinist, the second too young, and the third not to his taste.

Long ere the King had arrived at this point of his discourse, the keen-sighted minister had fathomed his determination to raise some obstacle in every instance; and he began to entertain a suspicion that this was not done without a powerful motive, which he immediately became anxious to comprehend. Thus, therefore, when Henry pressed him to declare his sentiments upon the subject, he answered cautiously: "I cannot, in truth, hazard an opinion, Sire; nor can I even understand the bent of your own wishes. Thus much only do I com-

* Mademoiselle de Longueville was the sister of Henry d'Orleans, first Duke de Longueville.

† Catherine de Rohan, second daughter of Réné II., Vicomte de Rohan, and of Catherine, the daughter and heiress of Jean de Parthenay, Seigneur de Soubise. When she had subsequently become the wife of the Duke de Deux-Ponts, Henry IV. was so enamoured of her as to make dishonourable proposals, to which she replied by the memorable answer: "I am too poor, Sire, to be your wife, and too well born to become your mistress."

‡ Diane de Luxembourg, who in 1600-1 gave her hand to Louis de Ploësqueler, Comte de Kerman, in Provence.

§ Mademoiselle de Guiménée was the daughter of Louis de Rohan, Prince de Guiménée, first Duke de Montbazon.

prehend—that you consent to take another wife, but that you can discover no princess throughout Europe with whom you are willing to share the throne of France. From the manner in which you spoke of the Infanta, it nevertheless appeared as though a rich heiress would not be unacceptable; but surely you do not expect that Heaven will resuscitate in your favour a Marguerite de Flandres, a Marie de Bourgogne, or even permit Elizabeth of England to grow young again."

"I anticipate nothing of the kind;" was the sharp retort; "but how know I, even were I to marry one of the princesses I have enumerated, that I should be more fortunate than I have hitherto been? If beauty and youth could have ensured to me the blessing of a Dauphin, had I not every right to anticipate a different result in my union with Madame Marguerite? I could not brook a second mortification of the like description, and therefore I am cautious. And now, as I have failed to satisfy myself upon this point, tell me, do you know of any one woman in whom are combined all the qualities which I have declared to be requisite in a Queen of France?"

"The question is one of too important a nature, Sire, to be answered upon the instant;" said Sully; "and the rather that I have never hitherto turned my attention to the subject."

"And what would you say," asked Henry with ill-concealed anxiety; "were I to tell you that such an one exists in my own kingdom?"

"I should say, Sire, that you have greatly the advantage over myself; and also that the lady to whom you allude must necessarily be a widow."

"Just as you please;" retorted the King; "but if you refuse to guess, I will name her."

"Do so;" said Sully with increasing surprise; "for I confess that the riddle is beyond my reach."

"Rather say that you do not wish to solve it;" was the cold reply; "for you cannot deny that all the qualities upon which I insist are to be found combined in the person of the Duchess de Beaufort."

"Your mistress, Sire!"

"I do not affirm that I have any intention, in the event of my release from my present marriage, of making the duchess my wife;" pursued Henry with some embarrassment; "but I was anxious to learn what you would say, if, unable to find another woman to my taste, I should one day see fit to do so."

"Say, Sire;" echoed the minister, struggling to conceal his consternation under an affected gaiety; "I should probably be of the same opinion as the rest of your subjects."

The King had, however, made so violent an effort over himself, in order to test the amount of forbearance which he might anticipate in his favourite counsellor, and was so desirous to ascertain his real sentiments upon this important subject, that he exclaimed impatiently: "I command you to speak freely; you have acquired the right to utter unpalatable

truths; do not, therefore, fear that I shall take offence whenever our conversation is purely confidential, although I should assuredly resent such a liberty in public."

The reply of the upright minister, thus authorised, was worthy alike of the monarch who had made such an appeal, and of the man to whom it was addressed. He placed before the eyes of his royal master the opprobrium with which an alliance of the nature at which he had hinted must inevitably cover his own name, and the affront it would entail upon every sovereign in Europe. He reminded him also that the legitimation of the sons of Madame de Beaufort, and the extraordinary and strictly regal ceremonies which he had recently permitted at the baptism of the younger of the two, (throughout the whole of which the infant had been recognised as a prince of the blood-royal although the King had himself refused to allow the registry of the proceedings until they were revised, and the obnoxious passages rescinded), could not fail, should she ever become Queen of France, in the event of her having other children, to plunge the nation into those very struggles for the succession, from which he had just declared his anxiety to preserve it.

"And this strife, Sire;" he concluded fearlessly; "would be even more formidable and more frightful than that to which you so anxiously alluded; for you will do well to remember that not only the arena in which it must take place will be your own beloved king-

dom of France, while the whole of civilised Europe stands looking on, but that it will be a contest between the son of M. de Liancourt and the King's mistress—the son of Madame de Monceaux, the divorced wife of an obscure noble, and the declared favourite of the sovereign; and, finally, between these, the children of shame, and the Dauphin of France, the son of Henry IV. and his Queen; I leave you, Sire, to reflect upon this startling fact before I venture further."

"And you do well;" said the monarch, as he turned away; "for truly you have said enough for once."*

It will be readily conceived that at the close of this conference M. de Sully was considerably less anxious than before to effect the divorce of the infatuated sovereign; nor was he sorry to remind Henry, when he next touched upon the subject, that they had both been premature in discussing the preliminaries of a second marriage before they had succeeded in cancelling the first. It was true that Clement VIII., in his desire to maintain the peace of Europe, had readily entered into the arguments of MM. Marquemont,† Ossat,‡ and

* Sully, Mém., vol. iii, pp. 162—174.

† Denys de Marquemont, Archbishop of Lyons, and subsequently cardinal (1626). He did not, however, long enjoy this dignity, to obtain which he had exerted all his energies, as he died at the close of the same year. He was a truckling politician, and an ambitious priest.

* Arnaud d'Ossat was born in 1536, at Cassagnaberre, a small village of Armagnac, near Auch. His parents lived in great

Duperron,* whom the duke had, by command of the monarch, entrusted with this difficult and dangerous mission, when they represented that the birth of a

indigence during his infancy, and at nine years of age he became an orphan, totally destitute. He was placed as an attendant about the person of a young gentleman of family, whose studies he shared with such success that, from the fellow-student of his patron, he became his tutor. After some time he accompanied his employer to Paris, where by persevering industry he completed his education, and was enabled to give lessons in philosophy and rhetoric. He then proceeded to Bourges, where he studied legal jurisprudence under the famous Cujas. Paul de Foix, Archbishop of Toulouse, when about to proceed as ambassador to Rome, engaged him as his secretary; and while there, he embraced the ecclesiastical profession, and rendered himself perfectly conversant with the whole policy of the papal court. Henry III. bestowed upon him the abbey of Notre-Dame de Varennes, but, as his claim was contested, he immediately resigned it. Subsequently he was raised to the bishopric of Rennes, was created a cardinal in 1598, and sometime afterwards was appointed to the see of Bayeux. His untiring devotion to the interests of France was ultimately recognised by his elevation to the dignity of minister under Henry IV.

* Jacques Davy Duperron was born at Berne, in 1556, and being learned in mathematics, Greek, Hebrew, and philosophy, he became a professor of those sciences in Paris, where he obtained the appointment of reader to Henry III. Having embraced the ecclesiastical profession, he received from Henry IV. (in 1591) the bishopric of Evreux, as a recompense for his devotion to the interests of Gabrielle d'Estrées. It was Duperron who obtained from the Pope the removal of the interdict fulminated against France. He ultimately became a cardinal, and Archbishop of Sens, and died in 1606.

Dauphin must necessarily avert all risk of a civil war in France, together with the utter hopelessness of such an event unless their royal master were released from his present engagements; and that the sovereign-pontiff had even expressed his willingness to second the wishes of the French monarch; but the consent of Marguerite herself was no less important; and with a view to obtain this, the minister addressed to her a letter, in which he expressed his ardent desire to effect a reconciliation between herself and the King, in order that the prayers of the nation might be answered by the birth of a Dauphin; or, should she deem such an event impossible, to entreat of her to pardon him if he ventured to take the liberty of imploring her Majesty to make a still greater sacrifice.

Sully had felt that it was unnecessary to explain himself more clearly, as a reconciliation between Henry IV. and his erring consort, had, from the profligate life which she was known to have led at Usson, become utterly impossible; nor could she doubt for an instant the nature of the sacrifice which was required at her hands. It was not, therefore, without great anxiety that he awaited her reply, which did not reach him for the space of five months; at the expiration of which period he received a letter, wherein she averred her willingness to submit to the pleasure of the King, for whose forbearance she expressed herself grateful; offering at the same time her acknowledgments to the duke himself for the interest which he exhibited towards her per-

son. From this period a continued correspondence was maintained between the exiled Queen and the minister; and she proved so little exacting in the conditions which she required as the price of her concession, that the affair would have been concluded without difficulty, had not the favourite, who was privy to the negociation, calculating upon her influence over the mind of the monarch, suddenly assumed an attitude which arrested its progress.

For a considerable time she had aspired to the throne; but it was not until she learnt that the agents of the King in Rome were labouring to effect the dissolution of his marriage with Marguerite de Valois; and that the Duke de Luxembourg* was also about to visit the papal court in order to hasten the conclusion of the negociations, that she openly declared her views to Sillery,†

* Henry de Luxembourg, Duke de Piney, was the descendant of the celebrated Count de Saint-Pol, and that branch of the family became extinct in his person. He died in 1616.

† Nicolas Brulart, Seigneur de Sillery, was the elder son of Pierre Brulart, president of the Court of Requests, at Paris. He obtained the office of court-councillor, in 1573, and subsequently that of master of the Court of Requests. Henry IV., after his accession to the throne of France, appointed him ambassador to Switzerland; and on his return from that country, made him sixth president, that dignity having become vacant by the death of Jean Le Maître. In 1598 he was one of the deputies by whom the peace of Vervins was concluded; and from thence he proceeded to Brussels with the Duke de Biron, to be present when the Archduke swore to the observance of the treaty. He next visited Italy

whom she knew to be already well affected towards her; declaring that should he be instrumental in inducing the King to make her his wife, she would pledge herself to obtain the seals for him on his return from Rome, as well as the dignity of chancellor so soon as it should be vacant.*

Sillery, whose ambition was aroused, was not slow to obey her wishes; and, finding the Pope unwilling to lend himself to the haste which was required of him, he not only informed him privately that, in the event of a divorce, his royal master was ready to espouse the Princess Marie de Medicis his kinswoman (although at this period Henry evinced no inclination towards such an alliance), but even when he discovered that his Holiness remained unmoved by this prospect of family aggrandisement, he ventured so far as to hint, in conjunction with the Cardinal d'Ossat, that it was probable, should the pontiff continue to withhold his consent to the annullation of the King's present marriage, he would dispense with it altogether, and make the Duchess de Beaufort Queen of France: a threat which so alarmed the sovereign prelate that, immediately declaring that he placed the whole affair in the hands of God, he com-

as ambassador extraordinary to the Pope, where he negociated the marriage of the King with Marie de Medicis. In 1604, Henry IV. created in his favour the office of keeper of the seals of France; and finally, on the death of the Chancellor de Bellièvre, he became his successor.

* Sully, Mém., vol. iii, pp. 189, 190.

manded a general fast throughout Rome, and shut himself up in his oratory, where he continued for a considerable time in fervent prayer. On his re-appearance he was calm,* and simply remarked: "God has provided for it."

A few days subsequently a courier arrived at Rome with intelligence of the death of the duchess.

Meanwhile Gabrielle by her unbridled vanity had counteracted all the exertions of her partisans. Aware of her power over the King, and believing that this divorce from Marguerite once obtained, she should find little difficulty in overcoming all other obstacles, she was unguarded enough prematurely to assume the state and pretensions of the regality to which she aspired, affecting airs of patronage towards the greatest ladies of the court, and lavishing the most profuse promises upon the sycophants and flatterers by whom she was surrounded. The infatuation of the King, whose passion for his arrogant mistress appeared to increase with time, tended, as a natural consequence, to encourage these unseemly demonstrations; nor did the friends of the exiled Queen fail to render her cognizant of every extravagance committed by the woman who aspired to become her successor; upon which Marguerite, who, morally fallen as she was in her own person, had never forgotten that she was alike the daughter and the consort

* "Comme s'il fût revenu d'extase," says Péréfixe, vol. ii, p. 300.

of a King, suddenly withdrew her consent to the proposed divorce; declaring, in terms more forcible than delicate, that no woman of blighted character should ever, through her agency, usurp her place.

The sudden and frightful death of the duchess which shortly afterwards supervened, having, however, removed her only objection to the proposed measure, her marriage with the King was, at length, finally declared null and void, to the equal satisfaction of both parties. The event which Marguerite had dreaded, had now become impossible; and she at once* forwarded a personal requisition to Rome, in which she declared that "it was in opposition to her own free will that her royal brother King Charles IX. and the Queen-mother had effected an alliance to which she had consented only with her lips, but not with her heart; and that the King her husband and herself being related in the third degree, she besought his Holiness to declare the nullity of the said marriage."†

On the receipt of this application, the pontiff—having previously ascertained that the demand of Henry himself was based on precisely the same arguments, and still entertaining the hope held out to him by Sillery that the King would, when liberated from his present wife, espouse one of his own relatives—immediately appointed a committee, composed of the Cardinal de Joyeuse, the

* In April, 1599.

† Bernard de Montfaucon. Les Monumens de la Monarchie Française, Paris 1733, in folio, vol. v, p. 396.

Archbishop of Arles,* and the Bishop of Modena, his nuncio and nephew, instructing them, should they find all circumstances as they were represented, to declare forthwith the dissolution of the marriage.†

Meanwhile the King, whose first burst of grief at the loss of the duchess had been so violent that he fainted in his carriage on receiving the intelligence, and afterwards shut himself up in the palace of Fontainebleau during several days, refusing to see the princes of the blood and the great nobles who hastened to offer their condolences, and retaining about his person only half a dozen courtiers to whom he was personally attached; had recovered from the shock sufficiently to resume his usual habits of dissipation and amusement. In the extremity of his sorrow he had commanded a general court mourning, and himself set the example by assuming a black dress for the first week; but as his regret became moderated, he exchanged his sables for a suit of violet, in which costume he received a deputation from the Parliament of Paris which was sent to condole with him upon the bereavement that he had undergone!‡ while the intelligence which reached him of the presumed treachery of the Duke de Biron, by compelling his removal to Blois, where he could more readily investigate the affair, completed a cure already more than half accomplished. There the sensual

* Horace del-Monte.

† Mezeray, vol. x, p. 123.

‡ Maintenon, Mém., Amsterdam, 1756, vol. ii, p. 115.

monarch abandoned himself to the pleasures of the table, to high play, and to those exciting amusements which throughout his whole life at intervals annihilated the monarch in the man: while the circle by which he had surrounded himself, and which consisted of M. le Grand,* the Count de Lude,† MM. de Thermes,‡ de Castelnau,§ de Calosse, de Montglat,‖ de Frontenac,¶

* Roger de St. Larry, Duke de Bellegarde, was the favourite of three successive sovereigns. Henry III. appointed him master of his wardrobe, and subsequently first gentleman of the chamber, and grand equerry. Henry IV. made him a knight of his Orders, in 1595; and, ultimately, Louis XIII. continued to him an equal amount of favour. The preservation of Quillebœuf, which he defended with great gallantry during the space of three weeks, with only forty-five soldiers and ten nobles, against the army of the Duke de Mayenne, acquired for him a renown which he never afterwards forfeited.

† Henri, Count, and subsequently Duke, de Lude, was the last male representative of his family. He was appointed grand-master of the artillery, in 1669, and died without issue, in 1685.

‡ Jean de St. Larry de Thermes, brother of the Duke d'Aiguillon.

§ Jacques, Marquis de Castelnau, subsequently Marshal of France, who, in 1658, commanded the left wing of the army at the battle of the Dunes, and died the same year, at the early age of thirty-eight.

‖ François de Paule de Clermont, Marquis de Montglat, first maître d'hôtel to the King.

¶ M. de Frontenac was one of the officers of Henry IV., who, before his accession to the throne of France (in 1576), had a quarrel with M. de Rosny, during which he told him that if he were to pull his nose, he could only draw out milk; a taunt to which

and de Bassompierre,* was but ill calculated to arouse in him better and nobler feelings. Ambitious, wealthy, witty, and obsequious, they were one and all interested in flattering his vanity, gratifying his tastes, and pandering to his passions; and it is melancholy to contemplate the perfect self-gratulation with which some of the highest-born nobles of the time have in their personal memoirs chronicled the unblushing subserviency with which they lent themselves to the encouragement of the worst and most debasing qualities of their sovereign.

the future minister replied by an assurance that he felt strong enough to draw blood out of that of his adversary with his sword. The peculiarity of this quarrel existed in the fact that, although de Rosny was a Protestant, and Frontenac a Catholic, M. de Turenne nevertheless espoused the cause of the latter; upon which M. de Lavardin, a Catholic, declared himself ready to second the arms of the adverse party.

* François, Baron de Bassompierre, was the son of Christophe de Bassompierre and Louise de Radeval, and was born on the 12th of April, 1579, at the château of Harouel, in Lorraine. He became at an early age the intimate companion and favourite of Henry IV., by whom he was appointed colonel-general of the Swiss troops. In the year 1603 he was made Marshal of France, and obtained great influence over both Marie de Medicis and her son, Louis XIII. Richelieu, who became jealous of his favour, caused him to be imprisoned in the Bastille, in 1631, where he remained for twelve years. He was an able diplomatist, a distinguished general, and a polished, though dissolute, courtier. He acquitted himself with great distinction in several sieges; and at his death, which occurred in 1646, he bequeathed to posterity his personal memoirs, which are among the most curious in the rich collections possessed by his countrymen.

Even before his departure for Blois, and during the period of his temporary retirement from the court, while Henry still wore the mourning habits which he had assumed in honour of his dead mistress, the more intimate of his associates could discover no means of consolation more effective than by inducing him to select another favourite.

"All the court," says a quaint old chronicler, himself a member of the royal circle; "were aware that the King had a heart which could not long preserve its liberty without attaching itself to some new object, a knowledge which induced the flatterers at court who had discovered his weakness for the other sex to leave nothing undone to urge him onward in this taste, and to make their fortunes by his defeat."*

Unfortunately, the natural character of the King lent itself only too readily to their designs; and, as already stated, they had profited by the opportunity afforded to them during the short retreat at Fontainebleau to arouse the curiosity of Henry on the subject of a new beauty. Whether at table, at play, or lounging beneath the shady avenues of the stately park, the name of Catherine Henriette d'Entragues was constantly introduced into the conversation, and always with the most enthusiastic encomiums;† nor was it long ere their pertinacity pro-

* Rambure, unpublished Mem., 1599, vol. i, pp. 151, 152.

† Catherine Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues, subsequently known as the Marquise de Verneuil, was the elder daughter of the celebrated Marie Touchet, who, after having been the mistress

Fac simile of a Page from the unpublished

Memoirs of the Marquis de Rambure.

Memoire du Marquis de Rambure 19

ce soit il nous le faut rapprandre, j'ai veu si le 1594
nos affaires en pire estat que celle où estoit le roy quand nous fesmes
venu a bout des choses plus difficiles, mais seulement
portés nous bien, point de melancolie mené la
main a l'œuvre et ne parlons tous tant que nous
sommes qu'apprandre Amiens, le Roy luy dit ce que
nous disions n'est pas sans apparance aussi notre lan-
gage vient de me consoler mais dites moy un pen
sur quoy nous fondés nous, ou pensés vous recouvrer
si tost les fortes et les moyens pour rapprandre une
si grande et si forte ville et si bien munie car vous
savés que nostre Artillierie, nos munitions nos vivres,
nos outils que nous avions assamblés avec une assés
grosse somme d'argent que nous y avés fait voiturer,
Je ne faut pas douter que les ennemis ne les ayent dehors
la ville tous les personnages inutilles et a leur place
il la rempliront des bons capitaines et les plus aguer-
ris soldats qu'ils auront, au moins cent fois que je fairés
si j'estois a leur place, dit le Roy respondit Mr. de
Rosni je vois bien que tout ce que vous alleguez a
beaucoup de vraysemblance et nous par les nous font
connoistre le parfait jugement dun grand Roy
comme a nous est et sur le cours dun grand capit-
aine
ne si le Prince qui nous donne son bien de loccupation

duced the desired effect, and the monarch expressed his desire to see the paragon of whom they all professed to be enamoured. A hunting-party was accordingly organised in the neighbourhood of the château of Malesherbes, where the Marquis d'Entragues was then residing with his family; and the fact no sooner became known to the mother of the young beauty, whose ambition was greater than her morality, and who was aware of the efforts which had been made to induce Henry to replace the deceased duchess by a new favourite, than she dispatched a messenger to entreat of his Majesty to rest himself under her roof after the fatigue of the chase. The invitation was accepted; and on his arrival Henriette was presented to the King; who was immediately captivated by her wit, and that charm of youthfulness, which had for some time ceased to enhance the loveliness of the once faultless Gabrielle. At this period, Mademoiselle d'Entragues had not quite attained her twentieth year, but she was already well versed in the art of fascination. Advisedly overlooking the monarch in the man, she conversed with a perfect self-possession, which enabled her to display all the resources of a

of Charles IX., became the wife of François de Balzac, Seigneur d'Entragues, de Marcoussis, and de Malesherbes, Governor of Orleans, who was, in 1573, elected a knight of St. Michael, by Henry III. Henriette, as her name implies, was, together with her two sisters, the issue of this marriage; while her half brother the Count d'Auvergne, subsequently the Duke d'Angoulême, was the son of Charles IX.

cultivated mind and a lively temperament; while Henry was enchanted by a gaiety and absence of constraint which placed him at once on the most familiar footing with his young and brilliant hostess; and thus, instead of departing on the morrow, as had been his original design, he remained during several days at Malesherbes, constantly attended by the marquise and her daughter, who were even invited to share the royal table.*

The Duchess de Beaufort had been dead only three weeks, and already the sensual monarch had elected her successor.

Less regularly handsome than Gabrielle d'Estrées, Mademoiselle d'Entragues was even more attractive from the graceful vivacity of her manner, her brilliant sallies, and her aptitude in availing herself of the resources of an extensive and desultory course of study. She remembered that, in all probability, death alone had prevented Gabrielle d'Estrées from ascending the French throne; and she was aware that, although less classically beautiful than the deceased duchess, she was eminently her superior in youth and intellect, and, above all, in that sparkling conversational talent, which is so valuable amid the *ennui* of a court. Well versed in the nature of the monarch with whom she had to deal, Mademoiselle d'Entragues accordingly gave free course to the animation and playfulness by which Henry was so

* Saint-Edme, Amours et Galanteries des Rois de France. Brussels, vol. ii, pp. 199, 200.

easily enthralled; skilfully turning the sharp and almost imperceptible point of her satire against the younger and handsomer of his courtiers, and thus flattering at once his vanity and his self-love. Still, the passion of the King made no progress save in his own breast. At times, Mademoiselle d'Entragues affected to treat his professions as a mere pleasantry, and at others to resent them as an affront to her honour; at one moment confessing that he alone could ever touch her heart, and bewailing that destiny should have placed him upon a throne, and thus beyond the reach of her affection; and at another declaring herself ready to make any sacrifice rather than resign her claim upon his love, save only that by which she could be enabled to return it. This skilful conduct served, as she had intended that it should do, merely to irritate the passion of the monarch; who, unconscious of the extent of her ambition, believed her to be simply anxious to secure herself against future disappointment and the anger of her family; and thus finding that his entreaties were unavailing, he resolved to employ another argument of which he had already frequently tested the efficacy, and on his return to Fontainebleau he dispatched the Count de Lude to the lady with what were in that age termed "propositions."

It is, from this circumstance, sufficiently clear that Henry himself was far from feeling any inclination to share his throne with the daughter of Charles IX.'s mistress; and that, despite the infatuation under which he laboured, he already estimated at its true price the value

of Henriette's affection. Nevertheless, the wily beauty remained for some short time proof against the representations of the royal envoy; nor was it until the equally wily courtier hinted that Mademoiselle d'Entragues would do well to reflect ere she declined the overtures of which he was the bearer, as there was reason to believe that the King had, on a recent visit to the widowed Queen Louise* at Chenonceaux, become

* Louise Marguerite de Lorraine, the widow of Henry III., was the elder daughter of Nicolas de Lorraine, Duke de Mercœur, Comte de Vaudemont, and of the Marquise d'Egmont, his first wife. Henry III. having seen her at Rheims, during his temporary residence in that city, became enamoured of her person, and their marriage took place on the 5th of February, 1575. François de Luxembourg, of the House of Brienne, had for some time paid his addresses to Mademoiselle de Lorraine, with the hope and intention of making her his wife; a fact which the licentious and frivolous King no sooner ascertained, than he declared his inclination to effect an alliance between the disappointed suitor and his own mistress, Mademoiselle de Chateauneuf, for whom he was anxious to provide through this medium. He consequently proposed the arrangement to M. de Luxembourg on the day of his coronation, but received the cold and firm reply, that the Count felt himself bound to congratulate Mademoiselle de Lorraine on her good fortune, since by changing her lover she had also been enabled to increase her dignity; but that, as regarded himself, since he could derive no benefit whatever from becoming the husband of Mademoiselle de Chateauneuf, he begged that his Majesty would excuse him from contracting such an alliance. The King, however, declared that he would admit of no refusal, and insisted upon his instant obedience; whereupon M. de Luxembourg demanded eight days to make the necessary preparations, to which Henry demurred, and it was

enamoured of Mademoiselle la Bourdaisière, one of her maids of honour,* that the startled beauty, who had deemed herself secure of her royal conquest, was induced to affix a price to the concession which she was called upon to make; and that M. de Lude returned bearing her *ultimatum* to the King.†

This *ultimatum* amounted to no less than a hundred thousand crowns;‡ and, setting aside the voluntary

finally arranged that he should be allowed three days for that purpose, after which he was to hold himself prepared to obey the royal command. These three days sufficed to enable the intended victim to make his escape, and he accordingly left the kingdom. His sarcasm against herself had so deeply irritated Queen Louise, that after the death of her husband, she entreated Henry IV. to revenge her injured dignity upon her former suitor, but the monarch declined to aid in any further persecution of the unfortunate young noble. The married life of the Queen was a most unhappy one, and appeared to have entirely disgusted her with the world, as on becoming a widow, she passed two years of seclusion and mourning at Chenonceaux, whence she removed to the château of Moulins, where she devoted herself to the most austere duties of religion. In her will, by which she bequeathed nearly the whole of her property to the church and to charitable purposes, she left a large sum for the erection of a Capuchin convent at Bourges, where she desired that she might be ultimately interred; but by command of Henry IV., the convent was built in the Faubourg St. Honoré, at Paris, and her body deposited in the chapel.

* Sully, Mém., vol. iii, p. 312.

† Saint-Edme, p. 200.

‡ Equal, in the present day, to nearly five hundred thousand livres.

degradation of the lady—a degradation which would appear to have been more than sufficient to disgust any man of delicacy who sought to be loved for his own sake—it was a demand which even startled the inconsiderate monarch himself, although he had not sufficient self-command to meet it with the contempt that it was calculated to excite. Well had it been, alike for himself and for the nation generally, had he suffered his better judgment on this occasion to assume the ascendant; and misdoubted, as he well might, the tears and protestations of so interested a person; particularly, when he could not fail to remember that he had been deceived even by Gabrielle d'Estrées, whom he had overwhelmed with riches and honours, and who had voluntarily given herself to him when he was young and handsome; whereas he was now in the decline of life, and was suing for the love of one so much his junior. Unfortunately, however, reason waged a most unequal warfare with passion in the breast of the French sovereign; and voluntarily overlooking alike the enormity of the demand, and the circumstances under which it was made, he at once dispatched an order to the finance-minister to supply the required sum. Sully had no alternative save obedience; he did not even venture upon expostulation; but he did better. When admitted to the royal closet, he alluded in general terms to the extreme difficulty which he anticipated in raising the required amount of four millions for the renewal of the Swiss alliance; and then, ap-

proaching the table beside which the King was seated, he proceeded slowly and ostentatiously to count the hundred thousand crowns destined to satisfy the cupidity of Mademoiselle d'Entragues. He had been careful to cause the whole amount to be delivered in silver; and it was not, therefore, without an emotion which he failed to conceal that Henry saw the numerous piles of money which gradually rose before him, and overspread the table.

Nevertheless, although he could not control an exclamation of astonishment, he made no effort to retrieve his error; but, after the departure of M. de Sully, placed the required amount in the hands of the Count de Lude, who hastened to transfer it to those of the frail beauty. It was not until after the receipt of this enormous present, that the Marquis d'Entragues and his step-son* affected to suspect the design of the King, and upbraided M. de Lude with the part which he had acted, desiring him never again to enter a house which he sought only to dishonour; an accusation which, from the lips of the husband of Marie Touchet was a mere epigram. He however followed up this demonstration, by removing his daughter from Malesherbes to Marcoussis, although with what intention it is difficult to determine, as the King at once proceeded thither, and at once obtained an interview.

Little accustomed to indulge in a prodigality so reck-

* Charles de Valois, the son of Charles IX. and Marie Touchet, dame de Belleville. He was subsequently Duke d'Angoulême, and grand prior of France. He died in 1639.

less, Henry had flattered himself that the affair was concluded; but such was by no means the intention of the young lady and her family. Henriette, indeed, received her royal lover with the most exaggerated assurances of affection and gratitude; but she nevertheless persisted in declaring that she was so closely watched as to be no longer mistress of her own actions, and so intimidated by the threats of her father, that she dared not act in opposition to his will. In vain did the King remonstrate, argue, and upbraid; the lady remained firm, affecting to bewail the state of coercion in which she was kept, and entreating Henry to exert his influence to overcome the repugnance of her family to their mutual happiness. To his anger she opposed her tears; to his resentment, her fascinations; and when at length she discovered that the royal patience was rapidly failing, although her power over his feelings remained unshaken, she ventured upon the last bold effort of her ambition, by protesting to the infatuated sovereign that her father had remained deaf to all her entreaties; and that the only concession which she could induce him to make was one which she had not courage to communicate to his Majesty. As she had, of course, anticipated, Henry at once desired her to inform him of the nature of the fresh demand which was to be made upon his tenderness; when, with well-acted reluctance, Mademoiselle d'Entragues repeated a conversation that she had held with the marquis, at the close of which he had assured her

that he would never consent to see her the mistress of the King until she had received a written promise of marriage under the royal hand, provided she became, within a year, the mother of a son.

"In vain, Sire;" she pursued hurriedly, as she perceived a cloud gather upon the brow of the monarch; "In vain did I seek to overcome the scruples of my parents, and represent to them the utter inutility of such a document; they declared that they sought only to preserve the honour of their house. And you well know, Sire," she continued with an appealing smile, "that, as I ventured to remind them, your word is of equal value with your signature, as no mere subject could dare to summon a great King like yourself to perform any promise. You, who have fifty thousand men at your command to enforce your will! But all my reasoning was vain. Upon this point they are firm. Thus then, since there is no other hope, and that they insist upon this empty form, why should you not indulge their whim, when it cannot involve the slightest consequence? If you love as I do, can you hesitate to comply with their desire? Name what conditions you please on your side, and I am ready to accept them—too happy to obey your slightest wish."

Suffice it that the modern Delilah triumphed, and that the King was induced to promise the required document;* a weakness rendered the less excusable,

* Dreux du Radier, vol, vi, pp. 62, 63. Saint-Edme, pp, 201, 202.

if indeed, as Sully broadly asserts: "Henry was not so blind but that he saw clearly how this woman sought to deceive him. I say nothing of the reasons which he also had to believe her to be anything rather than a vestal; nor of the state intrigues of which her father, her mother, her brother, and herself had been convicted, and which had drawn down upon all the family an order to leave Paris, which I had quite recently signified to them in the name of his Majesty."*

As it is difficult to decide which of the two the duke sought in his Memoirs to praise the most unsparingly, the sovereign or himself, the epithet of "this weak Prince," which he applies to Henry on the present occasion, proves the full force of his annoyance. He, moreover, gives a very detailed account of an interview which took place between them upon the subject of the document in question; even declaring that he tore it up when his royal master placed it in his hands; and upon being asked by the King if he were mad, had replied by saying: "Would to God that I were the only madman in France!"† As, however, I do not find the same anecdote recorded elsewhere by any cotemporaneous authority, I will not delay the narrative by inserting it at length; and the rather as, although from the influence subsequently exercised over the fortunes of Marie de Medicis by the frail favourite, I have already been compelled to dwell thus long upon her history,

* Sully, Mém., vol. iii, pp. 313, 314.

† Sully, Mém., vol. iii, p. 315.

it is one which I am naturally anxious to abridge as much as possible; I shall therefore only add, that the same biographer goes on to state that the contract which he had destroyed was rewritten by the King himself, who within an hour afterwards was on horseback, and on his way to Malesherbes, where he sojourned two days. It is, of course, impossible to decide whether Henry had ever seriously contemplated the fulfilment of so degrading an engagement; but it is certain, that only a few months subsequently he presented to Mademoiselle d'Entragues the estate of Verneuil, and that thenceforward she assumed the title of marquise, coupled with the name of her new possession.*

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 124.

CHAPTER II.

[1599.]

SULLY RESOLVES TO HASTEN THE KING'S MARRIAGE—AMBASSADORS ARE SENT FO FLORENCE TO DEMAND THE HAND OF MARIE DE MEDICIS—THE MARRIAGE ARTICLES ARE SIGNED — INDIGNATION OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—REVENGE OF HER BROTHER, THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE—THE DUKE OF SAVOY VISITS PARIS—HIS RECEPTION—HIS PROFUSION—HIS MISSION FAILS—COURT POETS—MARIE DE MEDICIS IS MARRIED TO THE FRENCH KING BY PROCURATION AT FLORENCE—HOSTILE DEMONSTRATIONS OF THE DUKE OF SAVOY — INFATUATION OF THE KING FOR THE FAVOURITE — HER PRETENSIONS — A WELL-TIMED TEMPEST—DIPLOMACY OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—HER RECEPTION AT LYONS—WAR IN SAVOY—MARIE DE MEDICIS LANDS AT MARSEILLES—MADAME DE VERNEUIL RETURNS TO PARIS—THE DUKE DE BELLEGARDE IS PROXY FOR THE KING AT FLORENCE—HE ESCORTS THE NEW QUEEN TO FRANCE — PORTRAIT OF MARIE DE MEDICIS—HER STATE-GALLEY—HER VOYAGE—HER RECEPTION—HENRY REACHES LYONS—THE ROYAL INTERVIEW — PUBLIC REJOICINGS — THE ROYAL MARRIAGE — HENRY RETURNS TO PARIS — THE QUEEN'S JEALOUSY IS AWAKENED — PROFLIGATE HABITS OF THE KING — MARIE'S ITALIAN ATTENDANTS EMBITTER HER MIND AGAINST HER HUSBAND — MARIE REACHES PARIS — SHE HOLDS A COURT — PRESENTATION OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL TO THE QUEEN — INDIGNATION OF MARIE—DISGRACE OF THE DUCHESS DE NEMOURS—SELF-POSSESSION OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL —MARIE TAKES POSSESSION OF THE LOUVRE—SHE ADOPTS THE FRENCH COSTUME—SPLENDOUR OF THE COURT—FESTIVAL GIVEN BY SULLY—A PRACTICAL JOKE — COURT FESTIVITIES — EXCESSIVE GAMBLING—ROYAL PLAY DEBTS—THE QUEEN'S FAVOURITE—A PETTICOAT INTRIGUE — LEONORA GALIGAÏ APPOINTED MISTRESS OF THE ROBES—RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE QUEEN AND MADAME DE VERNEUIL—THE KING GIVES THE MARQUISE A SUITE OF APARTMENTS IN THE LOUVRE—HER RIVALRY OF THE QUEEN—INDIGNATION OF MARIE — DOMESTIC DISSENSIONS—THE QUEEN AND THE FAVOURITE ARE AGAIN AT WAR—MADAME DE VERNEUIL EFFECTS THE MARRIAGE OF CONCINI AND LEONORA—GRATITUDE OF THE QUEEN—BIRTH OF THE DAUPHIN—JOY OF THE KING—PUBLIC REJOICINGS—BIRTH OF ANNE OF AUSTRIA—SUPERSTITIONS OF THE PERIOD — BELIEF IN ASTROLOGY — A ROYAL ANECDOTE—HOROSCOPE OF THE DAUPHIN—THE SOVEREIGN AND THE SURGEON—BIRTH OF GASTON HENRY, SON OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—PUBLIC ENTRY OF THE DAUPHIN INTO PARIS—EXULTATION OF MARIE DE MEDICIS.

CHAPTER II.

[1599.]

THE infatuation of the King for his new favourite decided M. de Sully to hasten by every means in his power the marriage of the sovereign with some European princess worthy to share his throne; and he accordingly instructed the royal agents at Rome to demand forthwith the hand of Marie de Medicis for the French monarch; while Henry, absorbed in his passion, permitted him to act as he saw fit, offering neither assistance nor impediment to a negociation on which his domestic happiness was in future to depend; nor was it until the duke urged upon him the necessity of selecting such of his nobility as it was his pleasure to entrust with the management of the affairs in conjunction with the ambassador whom the Grand-Duke, her uncle, was about to dispatch to Paris, that, by dint of importunity, he was induced to name M. de Sully himself, the Constable, the Chancellor, and the Sieur de

Villeroy,* whose son, M. d'Alincourt, had previously been sent to Rome to offer the acknowledgments of Henry to his Holiness for the dissolution of his marriage with Queen Marguerite, and to apprize him of that which he was desirous to contract with Marie de Medicis. This duty performed, M. d'Alincourt solicited the permission of the Pope to accompany Sillery to Florence to pay his respects to the Princess, and to negociate the alliance; and having obtained the required sanction, the two nobles set forth upon their embassy, quite unaware that the preliminaries were already nearly concluded.† So determined, indeed, had been the minister that no time should be afforded to the King to redeem the pledge which he had given to the favourite, that Joannini, the agent of the Grand Duke, had not been many days in Paris before the articles were drawn up and signed on both sides, and Sully was commissioned by the other contracting parties to communicate the termination of their labours to his royal master. The account given by the minister of this interview is highly characteristic:

"He had not;" says the chronicler; "anticipated such expedition: and thus when I had answered his question of where I had come from, by 'We come, Sire, from

* Charles de Neufville, Marquis d'Alincourt, Seigneur de Villeroy, secretary and minister of state, knight of the King's Orders, Governor of the city of Lyons, and of the provinces of Lyons, Forez, and Beaujolais.

† Mezeray, vol. x, pp. 124, 125.

marrying you'—the Prince remained for a quarter of an hour as though he had been stricken by thunder: then he began to pace the chamber with long strides, biting his nails, scratching his head, and absorbed by reflections which agitated him so violently that he was a considerable time before he was able to speak to me. I entertained no doubt that all my previous representations were now producing their effect; and so it proved, for ultimately recovering himself like a man who has at length taken a decided resolution: 'Well,' said he, striking his hands together; 'well, then, so be it; there is no alternative, since for the good of my kingdom you say that I must marry.'"*

Such was the ungracious acceptance of the haughty Florentine princess at the hands of her future bridegroom.

The indignation of Madame de Verneuil was unbounded when she ascertained that she had for ever lost all hope of ascending the throne of France; but it is nevertheless certain that she was enabled to dissimulate sufficiently to render her society indispensable to the King, and to accept with a good grace the equivocal honours of her position. Her brother, the Count d'Auvergne, was, however, less placable; he had always affected to believe in the validity of her claim upon the King; and his naturally restless and dissatisfied character led him, under the pretext of avenging her wrongs, to enter into a conspiracy which had recently been formed

* Sully, Mém., vol. iii, p. 317.

against the person of the King, whom certain malcontents sought to deprive alike of his throne and of his liberty, and to supersede in his sovereignty by one of the princes of the blood.* Among others, the Duke of Savoy,† who, during the troubles of 1588, had taken possession of the marquisate of Saluzzo, which he refused to restore, was said to be implicated in this plot; and he was the more strongly suspected as it had been ascertained that he had constant communication with several individuals at the French court, and that he had tampered with certain of the nobles; among others, with the Duke de Biron.‡ He had also succeeded in attaching to his

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 125.

† Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, surnamed the Great, was born in the château of Rivoles, on the 12th of January, 1562. He greatly distinguished himself by his gallantry upon several occasions, but tarnished his reputation by an ambition which was unscrupulous. He was remarkable for his literary attainments, and his friendship for men of letters; and was generally esteemed one of the greatest generals of the age. He was also so thorough a diplomatist, that it was commonly remarked that it was more difficult to penetrate his designs than the fastnesses of his duchy. He died at Savillan, on the 26th of July, 1630.

‡ Charles de Gontault, Duke de Biron, Peer, Admiral, and Marshal of France, acquired great reputation alike for his valour and his services. He was honoured with the confidence of Henry IV., who created the barony of Biron into a duchy-peerage for his benefit, and loaded him with proofs of his favour; Biron, however, repaid his sovereign with the basest ingratitude, by entering into a treaty with the Duke of Savoy and the Spaniards, who were both inimical to France. Having refused to acknow-

interests the Duchess de Beaufort; and had, during her lifetime, proposed to the King to visit France in person in order to effect a compromise, which he anticipated that, under her auspices, he should be enabled to conclude with advantage to himself. Henry had accepted the proposition; and although after the death of the duchess, M. de Savoie endeavoured to rescind his resolution, he found himself so far compromised that he was compelled to carry out his original purpose; and accordingly, on the 1st of December, he left Chambery with a train of twelve hundred horse, accompanied by the greater part of his ministers, his nobles, and the most magnificent members of his court.* As the French king had issued orders that he should, in every city through which he passed, be received with regal honours, he did not reach Fontainebleau until the 14th of the same month, where he arrived just as his royal host was mounting his horse to meet him. As he approached Henry he bent his knee, but the King immediately raised and embraced him with great cordiality; and during the seven days which he spent at Fontainebleau the court was one scene of splendour and dissipation. Balls, jousts, and hunting-parties succeeded

ledge his fault, and thereby exhausted the forbearance of the King, he was put upon his trial, convicted of the crime of *lèse-majesté*, and condemned to lose his head. The sentence was carried into execution in the court of the Bastille, on the 31st of July, 1602.

* Guichenon, Histoire de Savoie.

each other without intermission, but the Duke soon perceived that the monarch had no intention of taking the initiative on the errand which had brought him to France, a caution from which he justly augured no favourable result to his expedition;* while on his side the subject was never alluded to by Sully or any of the other ministers without his giving the most equivocal proofs of his determination to retain the marquisate.†

Meanwhile his conduct was governed by the most subtle policy; his bearing towards the monarch was at once deferential and familiar; his liberality was unbounded; and his courtesy towards the great nobles, and the officials of the court untiring and dignified.

On the eighth day after the arrival of the Duke at Fontainebleau the court removed to Paris, where Henry had caused apartments to be prepared for his royal guest in the Louvre; but M. de Savoie, after offering his acknowledgments for the proffered honour, preferred to take up his abode in the house of his relative the Duke de Nemours, near the Augustine convent. The whole of the Christmas festival was spent in a succession of amusements as splendid as those with which he had been originally received; and on the 1st of January, 1600, when it is customary in France to exchange presents, the Duke repaid all this magnificence by a profusion almost unprecedented. To the King, his

* Daniel, Histoire de France, vol. vii, p. 386.

† L'Etoile, Journal de Henri IV., vol. ii, p. 481.

offering was two large bowls and vases of crystal so exquisitely worked as to be considered unrivalled; while he tendered to Madame de Verneuil, who did the honours of the royal circle, and whom he was anxious to attach to his interests, a valuable collection of diamonds and other precious stones. Nor did his liberality end here, for there was not a great noble of the court who was not enriched by his munificence save the Duke de Biron; who, from policy, declined to accept some magnificent horses which were sent to him in the name of the Prince; and Sully, who, upon being presented by M. des Alimes, one of the principal Savoyard lords, with a snuff-box enriched with diamonds, and estimated at fifteen thousand crowns, containing a portrait of M. de Savoie, at once perceived that the costly offering was intended as a bribe, and declined to receive it, declaring that he had made a vow never to accept any present of value except from his own sovereign.*

The King responded to the liberality of his guest by the gift of a diamond star, of which the centre brilliant covered a miniature of Madame de Verneuil, together with other valuable jewels; but the profusion of the Duke was so great that his whole outlay upon this occasion was estimated at no less a sum than four hundred thousand crowns; and when it was believed that he must have exhausted his resources, he still further astonished the French nobles by appearing at a

* L'Etoile, vol. ii, pp. 436, 437.

ball which he gave to the court in a dress entirely covered with precious stones, and valued at a far higher sum than that which he had expended.*

That this profusion had been dictated by policy rather than by generosity was sufficiently apparent; and whatever effect it might have produced upon the minds of the courtiers, M. de Savoie was soon made aware that it had been utterly powerless over the resolution of the sovereign; for he no sooner ventured to allude to the subject of his voyage, than Henry with his accustomed frankness declared his determination to enforce his right to the marquisate which his guest had usurped; an assurance which determined the Duke to request that a commission might be appointed to examine their conflicting claims.

His demand was conceded; commissioners were appointed on both sides, and the question was rigidly discussed; propositions were mutually made and mutually declined; until finally the King, by the advice of his council, dispatched Sebastian Zamet† to the Duke

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 127.

† Sebastian Zamet was a wealthy contractor, of Italian origin, but who had caused himself to be naturalised in France, in 1581, together with his two brothers, Horace and John-Anthony Zamet. Although he ultimately became the father of an adjutant-general of the King's armies, and of a bishop, it was confidently asserted that during the preceding reign he had been a shoemaker. Be that as it may, it is no less certain that he must have possessed considerable talent, as even during the lifetime of Henry III. he was already a rich contractor, and under Henry IV. he was esteemed the richest in the kingdom. On the occasion of the mar-

of Savoy, with full authority to negociate either a restitution or an exchange; giving him at the same time three months in which to consult his nobility, and to decide upon the one measure or the other.

So skilfully did the envoy perform his mission, that he ultimately succeeded in inducing M. de Savoie to propose to the King, as compensation for the contested marquisate, the cession of certain towns and citadels named in a treaty which was signed by the two contracting parties; and this arrangement had no sooner been concluded than the court resumed its career of gaiety; nor was it until the 7th of March that the Duke finally took leave of his royal entertainer, and commenced his homeward journey.*

Meanwhile the court poets had not been idle; and while the Duke of Savoy had recognised the supremacy of the favourite by costly gifts, her favour had been

riage of one of his daughters, the notary who was employed to draw up the marriage-contract, finding it difficult to define his real rank, inquired by what title he desired to be designated; upon which Zamet calmly replied: "You may describe me as the *lord of seventeen hundred thousand crowns.*" His ready wit first procured for him the favour of Henry IV., which he subsequently retained by a system of complaisance of thoroughly Italian morality. His house was always open to the King, even for the most equivocal purposes; and so great was the familiarity with which he was treated by the dissolute monarch, that he constantly addressed him by a pet name, and held many of his orgies beneath his roof.

* L'Etoile, vol. ii, pp. 492, 493.

courted by the most popular of those time-serving bards who were accustomed to make their talents subservient to their interests; nor is it the least remarkable feature of the age that the three most fashionable rhymesters in the circles of gallantry were all ecclesiastics; and that the charms and *virtues* of Henriette d'Entragues were celebrated by a cardinal, a bishop, and an abbé !*

Her most palmy days were, however, at an end, for hitherto she had reigned undisputed mistress of the King's affections, and she was henceforward to hold at best a divided sway. On the 5th of May, M. d'Alincourt arrived at Fontainebleau from Florence, with the intelligence that, on the 25th of the preceding month, the contract of marriage between the French monarch and the Princess Marie de Medicis had been signed at the Palazzo Pitti, in the presence of Carlo-Antonio Putéi, Archbishop of Pisa, and the Duke of Bracciano; and that the bride brought as her dowry six hundred thousand crowns, besides jewels and other ornaments of value. He further stated that a "Te Deum" had been chanted, both in the Palazzo Pitti, and at the church of the Annunciation at Florence; after which the Princess Marie, declared Queen of France, had dined in public, seated under a dais above her uncle; and at the conclusion of the repast, the Duke de Bracciano had presented the water to wash her hands, and the Marquis de Sillery, the French Ambassador,

* Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, p. 58, n.

the napkin upon which she wiped them. Having made his report, and delivered his despatches, M. d'Alincourt placed in the hands of the King a portrait of Marie richly set in brilliants, which had been intrusted to him for that purpose; and the lover of Madame de Verneuil found himself solemnly betrothed.*

This fact, however, produced little visible effect upon the court circle, and still less upon the King himself; and after having afforded a subject of conversation for a brief interval, it soon appeared to be entirely forgotten amid the more absorbing matters of interest by which the minds of the different individuals were severally engrossed. From policy, the betrothal was never mentioned by the courtiers in the presence of Madame de Verneuil, a restraint which caused it to fall into partial oblivion; and the rather as the month of June had arrived without any demonstration on the part of the Duke of Savoy, who had availed himself of every possible pretext to evade the fulfilment of the treaty of Paris; and who had rendered it evident that force of arms alone could compel him to resign the usurped duchy. Even the monarch himself became at length convinced of the impolicy of further delay, and resolved forthwith to advance to Lyons, whither Sully had already dispatched both troops and artillery.† M. de

* L'Etoile, vol. ii, pp. 511, 512.

† Sully had recently been appointed grand-master of artillery.

Savoie had, however, during his sojourn in France, made many partisans, who urged upon their sovereign the expediency of still affording to the Duke an opportunity of redeeming his pledge; and Henry, even against his better reason, listened the more complacently to their counsels as Madame de Verneuil was about to become a mother, and he shrank from the idea of separation from her at such a moment. Thus he delayed his journey until Sully, who was not long in discovering the cause of his inaction, renewed his expostulations with still greater emphasis, and finally induced him to make preparations for an immediate departure. As the hour arrived, however, he again wavered, until at length he declared his determination to be accompanied by the marquise; but this arrangement was, from her state of health, soon found to be impossible; and after considerable difficulty he was persuaded to consent that she should await his return at Monceaux, whither he himself conduoted her, with renewed protestations that he loved her well enough to resign even then the alliance with Marie de Medicis, and to make her his wife.* This was precisely what the favourite still hoped to accomplish. She was aware of the extraordinary influence which she had obtained over the mind of her royal lover, and she looked forward to the birth of a son, as the one thing necessary to her success. Accordingly, before she suffered the King to depart, she compelled him to

* Saint-Edme, vol. ii, p. 207.

promise that he would be near her during her illness; and then she reluctantly saw him set forth to Moulins, where he was detained for a fortnight; his council not being able to agree as to the expediency of the campaign.

There can be little doubt that under other circumstances Henry would have found means to bring them to a decision; but as he was enabled during their discussions to receive daily intelligence of the marquise, he submitted quietly to a detention which seconded his own wishes.

At length the period arrived in which Madame de Verneuil was about to enforce her claim upon the tenderness of her royal lover, and already he spoke of returning for a while to Monceaux; when a violent storm, and the falling of a thunder-bolt in the very chamber of the invalid, so affected her nervous system, that she lost the infant upon which she had based all her anticipations of greatness; and although the King hastened to condole with her upon her disappointment, and even remained in constant attendance upon her sick-bed until she was partially convalescent, the great link between them was necessarily broken: a fact of which she was so well aware, that her temper gave way beneath the trial, and she bitterly upbraided her royal lover for the treachery of which she declared him to have been guilty in permitting his ministers to effect his betrothal with Marie de Medicis, when she had herself, as she affirmed, sacrificed everything for his sake. In

order to pacify her anger, the King loaded her with new gifts, and consoled her by new protestations; nor did his weakness end there, for so soon as her health was sufficiently re-established, he wrote to entreat of her to join him at Lyons; although not before she had addressed to him a most submissive letter, in which she assured him that her whole happiness depended upon his affection; and that as she had too late become aware that his high rank had placed an inseparable barrier between them, and that her own insignificance precluded the possibility of her ever becoming his wife, she at least implored of him to leave to her the happiness of still remaining his mistress; and to continue to feel for her the same tenderness of which he had hitherto honoured her with so many demonstrations.*

This was an appeal to which the enamoured monarch willingly responded; and the nature of her reception at Lyons tended still further to restore peace between them. What the Lyonnese had previously done in honour of Diana of Poitiers, when, as the accredited and *official* mistress of Henry III., she visited their city, they repeated in that of Madame de Verneuil, whose entrance within their gates was rather that of a crowned queen than a fallen woman; and this triumph was shortly afterwards augmented by her reception of the standards taken by the King at Charbonnières, which he caused to be conveyed to

* Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, pp. 74—76.

her as a proof of his devotion; and which she, with ostentatious pomp, transferred to the church of St. Just.

From Lyons Henry proceeded to Grenoble, still accompanied by Madame de Verneuil, the Duke of Savoy having at length declared that rather than submit to the conditions which had been proposed to him, he would incur the hazard of a war. In consequence of this decision, immediate measures were taken by the French generals to march upon Saluzzo; and the Maréchal de Biron, although already strongly suspected of disaffection to his sovereign, having collected a body of troops, possessed himself of the whole territory of Brescia. The town of Bourg was stormed by Du Terrail,* and taken, with the exception of the citadel; while M. de Créquy† entered Savoy, and made himself

* Louis de Comboursier, Seigneur de Terrail, commenced his military career as a cornet in the troop of the Dauphin. He was brave, but haughty and reckless, and was obliged to retire into Flanders, in consequence of having killed a man under the eyes of the King, and within the precincts of the Louvre. After making a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Loretto, he profited by his return through Turin to pay his respects to the Duke of Savoy, to whom he offered his services, and assistance in his project of taking the city of Genoa by surprise. The plot, was, however, discovered by a valet, who apprised the authorities of the intended treachery; and Du Terrail, together with a companion whom he had associated in the enterprise, were imprisoned in the castle of Yverdun, and thence conveyed to Genoa, where they were both decapitated, in the year 1609.

† Charles de Créquy was the representative of one of the most ancient families in France, which traced its descent from Arnoul,

master of the city of Montmelian, although the castle still held out.

Henry then resolved to enter Savoy in person; and having once more taken leave of the marquise who returned to Lyons, he marched upon Chambery, which immediately capitulated; and thence he proceeded to possess himself of the citadels of Conflans and Charbonnières which had hitherto been deemed impregnable. M. de Savoie, who had confided in the strength of his fortresses of Montmelian and Bourg, and who had continued to affect the most perfect indifference to the

called the *Old*, or the *Bearded*, who died in 897. The elder branch of the house became extinct in the person of Antoine de Créquy, cardinal and Bishop of Amiens, born in 1531, and who at his death, which occurred in the year 1574, left all his personal wealth, together with the family possessions which he inherited from his brothers, to Antoine de Blanchefort, the son of his sister, Marie de Créquy, on condition that he should bear the name and arms of his mother. The son of Antoine was Charles de Créquy, de Blanchefort, and de Canaples, Prince de Poix, Governor of Dauphiny, peer and maréchal of France, who became Duke of Lesdiguières by his marriage with Madelaine de Bonne, daughter of the celebrated Connétable de Lesdiguières, in 1611. His duel with Don Philippino, the bastard of Savoy, in which he killed his adversary, acquired for him a great celebrity; but he secured a more legitimate and desirable reputation by his gallantry in the taking of Pignerol and La Maurienne, in 1630. Three years subsequently he was sent as ambassador to Rome; in 1630 he conquered the Spanish forces on the Ticino; and in 1638 he was killed by a cannon-ball, at the siege of Brème, in Hanover.

approach of the French troops, now became seriously alarmed, and made instant preparations to relieve the Marquis de Brandis, the governor of the former fortress, for which purpose he applied to Spain for assistance. This was, however, refused; and both places fell into the hands of the French monarch, who then successively took Chablais and Faussigny; after which he sat down before the fortress of St. Catherine, which the Savoyards had erected to overawe the Genevese.*

During the siege of Fort St. Catherine, intelligence reached the King of the arrival of the young Queen at Marseilles; and meanwhile the gratification of the Pope at an alliance so flattering to his pride, had been of essential benefit to the French interest, as he had, in consequence, made no demonstration in favour of the Duke of Savoy, although it was not entirely without anxiety that he had seen the army of Henry approach his own dominions; but, satisfied that at such a conjuncture the French monarch would attempt no aggressive measures against Italy, he had consented to remain passive.

Madame de Verneuil was no sooner apprised of the landing of Marie de Medicis than, after having vehemently reproached the King with a haste which she designated as insulting to herself, she made instant preparations for her return to Paris, resolutely refusing to assist at the ceremonious reception of the new Queen; nor could the expostulations of Henry, even accompanied

* Péréfixe, Histoire de Henri le Grand, vol. ii, pp. 329—333.

as they were, by the most profuse proofs of his continued affection, induce her to rescind her determination. To every representation of the monarch she replied by reminding him that out of all the high nobles of his court, he had seen fit to select the Duke de Bellegarde as the bearer of his marriage-procuration to the Grand-Duke of Florence—thus indemnifying him to the utmost in his power for the mortification to which he had been subjected by the royal refusal to permit him to act personally as his proxy; while she assured him that she was not blind to the fact that this selection was meant as an additional affront to herself, in order to avenge the preposterous notion which his Majesty had adopted, that, after having previously paid his court to the Duchess of Beaufort during her period of power, the duke had since transferred his affections to herself.

Under all circumstances, this accusation was most unfortunate and ill-judged, and should in itself have sufficed to open the eyes of the monarch, who had, assuredly, had sufficient experience in female tactics to be quite aware that where a woman is compelled mentally to condemn herself, she is the most anxious to transfer her fault to others, and to blame where she is conscious of being open to censure. Madame de Verneuil had not, however, in this instance at all miscalculated the extent of her influence over the royal mind; as, instead of resenting an impertinence which was well fitted to arouse his indignation, Henry weakly

condescended to justify himself, and by this unmanly concession laid the foundation of all his subsequent domestic discomfort.

Madame de Verneuil returned to Paris, surrounded by adulation and splendour, and the King was left at liberty to bestow some portion of his thoughts upon his expected bride. It is probable, indeed, that the portrait of Marie presented to him by the Grand-Duchess, had excited his curiosity, and flattered his self-love; for it was more than sufficiently attractive to command the attention of a monarch even less susceptible to female beauty than himself. Marie was still in the very bloom of life, having only just attained her twenty-fourth year; nor could the King have forgotten that when, some time previously, her portrait had been forwarded to the French court together with that of the Spanish Infanta, Gabrielle d'Estrées, then in the full splendour of her own excelling loveliness, had exclaimed as she examined them: "I should fear nothing from the Spaniard, but the Florentine is dangerous." From whatever impulse he might act, however, it is certain that after the departure of the favourite, Henry publicly expressed his perfect satisfaction with the marriage which he had been induced to contract,* and lost no time in issuing his commands for the reception of his expected bride.

The Duke de Bellegarde, Grand-Equerry of France, had reached Livourna on the 20th of September,

* Saint-Edme, vol. ii, pp. 211, 212.

accmopanied by forty French nobles, all alike eager, by the magnificence of their appearance, and the chivalry of their deportment, to uphold the honour of their royal master. Seven days subsequently, he entered Florence, where he delivered his credentials to the Grand-Duke, having been previously joined by Antonio de Medicis with a great train of Florentine cavaliers who had been sent to meet him; and the same evening he had an interview with his new sovereign, to whom he presented the letters with which he had been intrusted by the King.*

On the 4th of October, the Cardinal Aldobrandini, the nephew and legate of the Pope, who had already been preceded by the Duke of Mantua and the Venetian Ambassador, arrived in his turn at Florence, in order to perform the ceremony of the royal marriage. His Eminence was received at the gate of the city by the Grand-Duke in person, and made his entry on horseback under a canopy supported by eight young Florentine nobles, preceded by all the ecclesiastical and secular bodies; while immediately behind him followed sixteen prelates, and fifty gentlemen of the first families in the duchy bearing halberds. On reaching the church, the prelate dismounted, and thence, after a brief prayer, he proceeded to the ducal palace. At the conclusion of the magnificent repast which awaited him, the legate, in the presence of his royal host, of the Dukes of Mantua

* Montfaucon, vol. v, p. 402.

and Bracciano, the Princes Juan and Antonio de Medicis, and the Sieur de Bellegarde, announced to the young Queen the entire satisfaction of the Sovereign Pontiff at the union upon which he was about to pronounce a blessing: to which assurance she replied with grace and dignity.

On the morrow, a high mass was celebrated by the cardinal in the presence of the whole court; and during its solemnization he was seated under a canopy of cloth of gold at the right hand side of the altar, where a chair had been prepared for him upon a platform raised three steps above the floor. He had no sooner taken his place, than the Duke de Bellegarde, approaching the Princess (who occupied a similar seat of honour, together with her uncle, at the opposite side of the shrine), led her to the right hand of the legate; the Grand-Duke at the same time placing himself upon his left, and presenting to his Eminence the procuration by which he was authorised to espouse his niece in the name of the King. The document was then transferred to two of the attendant prelates, by whom it was read aloud; and, subsequently, the authority given by the Pope for the solemnization of the marriage was, in like manner, made public. The remainder of the nuptial service was then performed amid perpetual salvos of artillery. In the evening a splendid ball took place at the palace, followed by a banquet, at which the new Queen occupied the upper seat, having on her right the legate of his Holiness, the Duke of Mantua, and the Grand-

Duke her uncle; who, in homage to her superior rank, ceded to her the place of honour; and on her left, the Duchesses of Mantua, Tuscany, and Bracciano; the Duke de Bracciano acting as equerry, and Don Juan, the brother of the Grand-Duke, as cupbearer.

The four following days were passed in a succession of festivities; hunting-parties, jousts, tiltings at the ring, racing, and every other description of manly sport occupying the hours of daylight; while the nights were devoted to balls and ballets, in which the Florentine nobility vied with their foreign visitors in every species of profusion and magnificence. Among other amusements, a comedy in five acts was represented, on which the outlay was stated to have amounted to the enormous sum of sixty thousand crowns.

At the close of the court festivals, the Cardinal Aldobrandini took his leave of the distinguished party, and proceeded to Chambery; but the Queen lingered with her family until the 13th of the month, upon which day, accompanied by the Grand-Duchess her aunt, the Duchess of Mantua her sister, her brother Don Antonio, the Duke de Bracciano, and the French Ambassador, she set forth upon her journey to her new kingdom.*

Without being strictly beautiful, Marie de Medicis possessed a person at once pleasing and dignified. All the pride of her Italian blood flashed from her large dark eye, while the consciousness of her exalted rank

* L'Etoile, vol. ii, pp. 534—537.

lent a majesty to her deportment which occasionally, however, in moments of irritation, degenerated into haughtiness. Her intellect was quick and cultivated, but she was deficient alike in depth of judgment and in strength of character. Amiable, and even submissive in her intercourse with her favourites, she was vindictive and tyrannical towards those who fell under the ban of her displeasure: and with all the unscrupulous love of intrigue common to her race, she was nevertheless unguarded in her confidences, unstable in her purposes, and short-sighted in her policy. In temper, she was hot, impatient and irascible; in temperament, jealous and exacting; while her vanity and love of power, perpetually made her the tool of those who sought to profit by her defects.

It is probable that throughout the whole of Europe no princess could have been selected less constituted to make the happiness of a sovereign who, like Henry IV., had not scrupled to avow to his minister that he dreaded domestic dissension far more than foreign warfare; but who at the same time did not hesitate, by his own irregularities, to arouse all the worst passions in the bosom of an outraged wife.

On the 17th of October the royal bride reached Livorna, where she made her entry in great pomp, and was received with the most enthusiastic acclamations; and on the following day she embarked in the state-galley of the Grand-Duke, one of the most magnificent vessels which had ever floated upon the blue waters of

the Mediterranean. Seventy feet in length, it was impelled by fifty-four oars, and was richly gilded from stem to stern; the borders of the poop being inlaid with a profusion of lapis-lazuli, mother-of-pearl, ivory, and ebony. It was, moreover, ornamented by twenty large circles of iron interlaced, and studded with topaz, emeralds, pearls, and other precious stones; while the splendour of the interior perfectly corresponded with this gorgeous framework. In the principal cabin, which was hung and carpeted with cloth of gold, a seat of state had been arranged for the Queen, opposite to which were suspended the shields of France and of the house of Medicis side by side; the fleurs-de-lys of the former being composed of large diamonds, and the device of the latter represented by five immense rubies and a sapphire, with an enormous pearl above, and a fine emerald in the centre.* This fairy vessel was followed by five other galleys furnished by the Pope, and six appertaining to the Grand-Duke; and thus escorted Marie de Medicis reached Malta, where she was joined by another fleet which awaited her off that island; but, despite all this magnificence, the voyage of the Queen was anything but propitious, for after arriving at Esperies, where the authorities of Genoa proffered to her, with great respect, the attendance of their own flotilla, she had no sooner reached Portofino, than she was compelled to anchor for several days from stress of weather. Unaccustomed

* Prus., vol. ii, p. 28.

as she was, however, to this mode of travelling, the high-spirited young Queen resisted all the entreaties of those about her, who were anxious that she should land until the wind had moderated, simply remarking that the King had given no directions to that effect;* and retaining, amid all the dismay and discomfort by which she was surrounded, not only her self-command, but even her cheerfulness.†

Meanwhile, Henry had no sooner ascertained the approach of his royal bride, than he forthwith dispatched to welcome her, the Constable, the Chancellor, and the Dukes of Nemours, Ventadour, and Guise; and these princes were followed on the ensuing day by the Cardinals de Joyeuse, de Gondy, and de Sourdis; after which he intimated his pleasure to all the several princesses and great ladies of the court who were then sojourning at Grenoble in order to be near the royal army, that they should immediately set forth to pay their respects to their new sovereign, and remain in

* Malherbe, the favourite poet of Marie de Medicis, profited by the tediousness of her voyage to make it the subject of an allegory, in which he represents that Neptune

" Dix jours ne pouvant se distraire
Au plaisir de la regarder,
Il a, par un effort contraire,
Essayé de la rétarder."

A specimen of his godship's gallantry, with which the young sovereign would, in all probability, most willingly have dispensed.

† L'Etoile, vol. ii, p. 537.

attendance upon her person until her entry into Paris; a command which was so literally obeyed, that three days afterwards the city was utterly stripped of the aspect of gaiety and splendour which had rendered it for a time an epitome of the capital itself.

On the 28th of October, the Queen once more put to sea, and two days subsequently she entered the port of Toulon, where she landed under a canopy of cloth of gold, with her fine hair flowing over her shoulders.* There she remained for two days, in order to recover from the effects of her voyage; after which she re-embarked, and proceeded to Marseilles, where she arrived on the evening of Friday, the 3rd of November. A gallery had been constructed from the port to the grand entrance of the palace in which apartments had been prepared for her; and on stepping from her galley, she was welcomed by the Chancellor,† who announced to her the orders that he had received from the King relative to her reception, and presented to her Majesty the Connétable-Duke de Montmorency,‡

* Valadier, 1600.

† M. de Sillery.

‡ Henri I., de Montmorency, duke, peer, marshal, and Constable of France, Governor of Languedoc, &c., was the second son of the celebrated Anne de Montmorency. He rendered himself famous, during the life time of his father, under the name of the Seigneur de Damville, and made prisoner the Prince de Condé at the battle of Dreux, in 1562. Having subsequently incurred the displeasure of Catherine de Medicis, he retired to the court of the Duke of Savoy, and became the leader of the malcontents in

and the Dukes of Nemours* and Ventadour.† The consuls and citizens then tendered to her upon their knees the keys of the city in gold, linked together by a chain of the same precious metal; after which ceremony, the young Queen was conducted to the palace under a rich canopy, preceded by the Constable, surrounded by the cardinals and prelates who had been sent to welcome her, and followed by the wife of the Chancellor, and the other great ladies of the court. So long a delay having occurred between her betrothal and her marriage, the Princess had been enabled to render herself mistress of the language of her new country; and the satisfaction of the courtiers was consequently undisguised when she offered her acknowledgments for the courtesy of her

Languedoc during the reign of Henry III. Henry IV. restored him to all his honours, and made him Constable of France, and a knight of the Order of the Holy Ghost, in 1593. He died at an advanced age, in the town of Agde, in 1614.

* Charles Amédée de Savoie, Duke de Nemours, was the son of Jacques de Savoie and of Anne d'Est, whose first husband was the Duke de Guise. This lady made herself very conspicuous during the *League*. Charles Amédée married Elizabeth, the sister of César de Vendôme, Duke de Beaufort, and during the *Fronde* attached himself to the party of the princes; but having quarrelled with his brother-in-law, he was killed by him in a duel, in the year 1652.

† Anne de Levis, Duke de Ventadour, was the representative of one of the most ancient and illustrious families of France, which derived its name from the estate of Levis, near Chevreuse, where his ancestor, Guy de Levis, a famous general, founded in the year 1190 the abbey of La Roche.

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reception in their own dialect; a gratification which was enhanced by the fact that Marie had made no effort to assimilate her costume to that of the French court, but appeared in a robe of cloth of gold on a blue ground, fashioned in the Italian taste, and, with her fine fair hair simply braided and utterly destitute of powder;* a circumstance which had already sufficed to awaken the jealousy of the French princesses.

On the following day, the Queen held a reception in the great hall of the palace, and graciously listened, surrounded by her august relatives, to the eloquent and celebrated harangue of M. du Vair,† the president of the Parliament of Provence; to which she had no sooner replied than she hastened to examine from the balcony a sumptuous state carriage presented to her by the King; and then retired to her own apartments, attended by her personal suite. Of the royal vehicle in question Cayet gives a minute description, which we transcribe

* Valadier, year 1600.

† Guillaume du Vair, ultimately Bishop of Lizieux, and Keeper of the Seals, was the son of Jean du Vair, chevalier and attorney-general of Catherine de Medicis and Henri de France, Duke d'Anjou. He was born at Paris, on the 8th of March, 1556, and was successively counsellor of parliament, master of requests, first president of the Parliament of Provence, and finally (in 1616), keeper of the seals. He subsequently embraced the ecclesiastical profession, and was elevated to the see of Lizieux, in 1618. He was a man of consummate talent; and his works, which were published in folio in Paris, in 1641, are still highly esteemed. M. du Vair died at Tonnoins, in Agénois, in 1621, at the age of sixty-six years.

as affording an accurate idea of the taste displayed in that age in the decoration of coaches: "It was," he says; "covered with brown velvet and trimmed with silver tinsel on the outside; and within it was lined with carnation-coloured velvet, embroidered with gold and silver. The curtains were of carnation damask, and it was drawn by four grey horses."* These royal conveyances were, however, far less convenient than showy, being cumbrous and ungraceful in form, rudely suspended upon leathern straps, and devoid of windows, the use of glass not becoming known until the succeeding reign.

On the morrow during her toilette the Queen received the principal ladies of the city, who had the honour of accompanying her to the temporary chapel which adjoined the principal saloon, where a high mass was performed with all the magnificent accessories of which it was susceptible; the numerous prelates and high dignitaries of the church then assembled at Marseilles assisting at its celebration. The subsequent days were spent in courtly festivities and a survey of the noble city, where the ponderous and gilded coach of the royal bride was followed by the wondering acclamations of the dazzled and delighted populace, probably little less dazzled and delighted than herself; for Marie de Medicis, young and ambitious, could not but be forcibly struck by the contrast of her present splendour with the comparative obscurity of the court to which she had been previously habituated.

* Chronologie Septennaire, p. 184.

On the 16th of the month, however, she experienced her first trial, in a separation from the Grand-Duchess her aunt, and the Duchess of Mantua her sister, who then took their leave, and returned to Florence in the galleys which were still awaiting them; and they had no sooner left the port, than the Queen, followed by the brilliant train by which she had been surrounded since her arrival in France, proceeded to Aix, where she remained two days; and on the morning of the third, she made her entry at Avignon escorted by two thousand horsemen who met her before she reached the city, and officiated as a guard of honour. Every street through which she passed was richly decorated; tapestry and velvet hangings were suspended from the windows, and draped the balconies; triumphal arches and platforms, splendidly decorated and covered with devices and emblems appropriate to the occasion, were to be seen on all sides; and finally, in the great square of the city, her progress was arrested by a stately procession of ecclesiastics, in whose name she was harangued by François Suarés;* who having, in the course of his address, expressed his ardent hope that before the anniversary of her entry into Avignon, she might give

* François Suarés, a celebrated scholar and theologian, was born at Granada in 1548, and in 1564 became a Jesuit. He taught theology, with great success, at Alcala, Salamanca, Rome, and Coimbra; and died at Lisbon in 1617. His collected works were published in twenty-three folio volumes, and are principally treatises on theology and morals. His treatise on the laws was reprinted in England.

a Dauphin to France, she momentarily interrupted by exclaiming energetically: "I will pray to God to grant me that grace!"*

The royal train then again moved forward, and Marie took possession of the stately abode which had been prepared for her, amid the firing of musketry, the pealing of bells, and the shouts of the excited people, in whom the affability and beauty of their new Queen had aroused the most ardent feelings of loyalty and hope.

On the following day, the corporation of the city presented to their young sovereign a hundred and fifty medals of gold, some of which bore on their obverse her own profile, and others that of the King, their reverse being in every case a representation of the town by which the offering was made; and on the ensuing evening she attended a banquet given in her honour by the papal vice-legate at the palace of Rouvre, where at the conclusion of the ball, as she was about to retire with her suite, the tapestry hangings of the saloon were suddenly withdrawn, and revealed a magnificent collation served upon three separate tables. Among other costly delicacies, the guests were startled by the variety and profusion of the ornamental sugar-work which glistened like jewellery in the blaze of the surrounding tapers; for not only were there representations of birds, beasts, and fishes, but also fifty statues, each two palms in height, presenting in the same frail

* L'Etoile, Journal de Henry IV., vol. ii, p. 589.

material the effigies of pagan deities and celebrated emperors; so marvellous indeed had been the outlay of the prelate on this one luxury, that at the close of the repast three hundred baskets of the most delicate confectionary, consisting chiefly of fruits skilfully imitated in sugar, were distributed among the fair and astonished guests.*

During her sojourn at Avignon, Marie received from the hands of M. de Rambure, whom the King had dispatched from Savoy for that purpose, not only his renewed assurances of welcome, but also the costly gifts which he had prepared for her. "After the departure of the princes and cardinals," says the quaint old chronicler, "his Majesty desired my attendance in his chamber, and I had no sooner entered than he exclaimed: 'Friend Rambure, you must go and meet our future Queen, whom you must overtake two days before her arrival at Lyons; welcome her in my name, and present to her this letter, and these two caskets of gems, together with these chests containing all the materials necessary for her first state-toilette; and having done this, bring me back her answer without delay. You will find a relay of horses awaiting you at every second league, both going and coming, in order that you may use all speed, and give me time to reach Lyons so soon as I shall know that she is to be there.'" This order could not, however, be implicitly obeyed, as the courtier was only enabled on his return

* Cayet, p. 187. L'Etoile, vol. i, p. 539, 540.

to the King's presence, to inform him that the Princess would enter Lyons that very day; upon which Henry instantly ordered post-horses, and accompanied by Sully, Rambure, and ten more of his favourite nobles, he commenced his journey, making, as he rode along, a thousand inquiries relative to his young wife, her deportment, and her retinue; asking with the utmost earnestness how she had received the presents which he had sent; and finally demanding of M. de Rambure if he were satisfied with the diamond ring that she had presented to him; a question which his messenger was careful to answer in the affirmative, at the same time assuring his Majesty that although he valued the jewel itself at a hundred pistoles, he prized it still more as the gift of so illustrious a Princess and Queen.*

On the 3rd of December, the Queen reached La Guillotiere, one of the faubourgs of Lyons, where she passed the night; and on the following morning she proceeded to Lamothe, where she assisted at the mass, and subsequently dined. At the close of the repast, all the several civic corporations paid their respects to their new sovereign, the Chancellor replying to their harangue in the name of the Queen; who, immediately that they had retired, ascended her carriage, and entered the city gates in the same state, and amid the same acclamations which had accompanied her entry at Avignon. The suave majesty of her demeanour, the magnificence of her apparel, and the flush of health and happiness which

* Rambure, MS. Mém., vol. i, p. 276, 277.

glowed upon her countenance, filled the people with enthusiasm; and as her ponderous coach crushed beneath its ungainly wheels the flowers and branches that had been strewn upon her passage; and that, with its heavy curtains drawn back, she showed herself in all her imperial beauty, dividing her smiles between the richly-attired groups who thronged the windows and balconies, and the tumultuous multitude who ran shouting and gesticulating at her side, the popular enthusiasm was as great as though in her person each individual beheld an earnest of the future prosperity and happiness of the nation over which she had been called to reign. Triumphal arches, floating draperies, and emblematic devices, were scattered over the city; and thus welcomed and escorted, she reached the cathedral, where an address was delivered by M. de Bellièvre,* and a "Te Deum" was solemnly performed.

In the course of the afternoon the young Queen received M. de Roquelaure,† who had been dispatched

* Albert de Bellièvre was the second son of the celebrated Chancellor Pompone de Bellièvre and of Marie Prunier, demoiselle de Grignon. He was a distinguished classic and an elegant scholar. Having become Archbishop of Lyons, he subsequently transferred that dignity to his younger brother Claude, and retired to his abbey of Jouy, where he died, in 1621.

† Antoine de Roquelaure, Seigneur de Roquelaure in Armagnac, de Guadoux, &c., marshal of France, grand-master of the King's wardrobe, knight of the Orders of St. Michael and the Holy Ghost, perpetual mayor of Bordeaux, &c., was the younger son of Geraud Roquelaure, and the representative of an illustrious house. He was highly esteemed both by Jeanne

by the monarch to announce that he was already on his way to Lyons;* and her interview with this new messenger had no sooner terminated than she was invited to pass into the great saloon, where several costly vases of gold and silver were presented to her in the name of the citizens; after which she was permitted to take the repose which she so greatly needed while awaiting the arrival of the King.

Meanwhile Henry, who was not expected until the 10th of the month, reached Lyons on the previous evening just as the Queen had taken her seat at the supper-table; and being anxious to form his own judgment of her person and deportment before he declared his identity, he entered the apartment in an undress military uniform, trusting in this disguise to pass unnoticed among the throng of attendants. The Chancellor had, however, hurriedly seized an opportunity of intimating to Marie the arrival of her royal consort; while the King had no sooner crossed the threshold than he was recognised by several of the nobles; who, by hastily stepping aside to enable him to pass, created a movement which the quick eye of the Princess instantly detected, and of whose cause she did

d'Albret, Queen of Navarre and by Henry IV., who loaded him with honours and distinctions in requital of his faithful and zealous services. He subsequently became governor of several provinces, and was created a marshal of France by Louis XIII., in 1615. He restored to their allegiance Clerac, Nerac, and several other revolted fortresses; and died at Leictoure, in 1625, at the age of eighty-two years.

* Daniel, vol. vii, p. 398.

not remain one instant in doubt. Nevertheless, she betrayed no sign of her consciousness of the monarch's presence; while he, on his side, aware that all further incognito had become impossible, hastily retired.

When he had withdrawn the Queen instantly ceased eating; and, as each succeeding dish was presented to her, silently motioned its removal. Thus the remainder of the repast was rapidly terminated; and at its close, she rose and retired to her private apartments, which she had scarcely reached when a loud stroke upon the door of the ante-room, so authoritatively given that she was at once made aware of the approach of her royal consort, caused her to rise from the arm-chair in which she was seated, and to advance to the centre of the floor. She had scarcely done so when the tapestry hanging was drawn aside; and M. le Grand* entered, followed by the impatient monarch. In an instant she was at his feet, but in the next she found herself warmly and affectionately welcomed; nor was it until he had spent half an hour in conversation with her, that the King, weary and travel-worn as he was, withdrew to partake of the refreshment which had been prepared for him. On the following afternoon their Majesties, occupying the same carriage, attended vespers with great pomp at the abbey of Aisnay; after which they passed the ensuing days in a succession of the most splendid festivities, at which the whole of the court were present (the cost of those of the 13th being entirely at the expense of the monarch, in celebration of his birth-day),

* Duke de Bellegarde.

until the arrival of the Cardinal Aldobrandini, whom the King had invited from Chambery to be present at the public celebration of his nuptials, and who entered the city in state, when preparations were immediately made for the august rite upon which he was to confer his benediction.

At the close of a state dinner on the morrow (17th of December), the royal couple proceeded, accompanied by all the princes and great nobles of the court, to the church of St. John; where the papal legate, surrounded by the Cardinals of Joyeuse,* Gondy,† and Sourdis,‡ together with the prelates then residing in

* François de Joyeuse was the second son of Guillaume, Vicomte de Joyeuse, Marshal of France. He was born in the year 1562, and received a brilliant education, by which he profited so greatly as to become celebrated for his scientific attainments. He was successively Archbishop of Narbonne, of Toulouse, and of Rouen; and enjoyed the entire confidence of three monarchs, by each of whom he was entrusted with the most important state affairs. Highly esteemed, alike for his wisdom, prudence, and capacity, he died full of honours at the age of fifty-three years, at Avignon, where he had taken up his abode as senior cardinal. He left, as monuments of his piety, a seminary which he founded at Rouen, a residence for the Jesuits at Pontoise, and another for the Fathers of the Oratory at Dieppe.

† Pierre de Gondy (or Gondi), Bishop of Langres, and subsequently Archbishop of Paris, who was called to the conclave by Pope Sixtus V., in 1587. He died at Paris, in February, 1616, at the advanced age of eighty-four years. The Cardinal de Gondy was the first Archbishop of Paris, the metropolis having previously been only an episcopal see.

‡ François d'Escoubleau, better known under the name of Cardinal de Sourdis, was the son of François d'Escoubleau, Mar-

the city, were already awaiting them. The royal bride retained her Tuscan costume, which was overlaid with the splendid jewels that formed so considerable a portion of her dowry; the most conspicuous among them being an ornament serving as a stomacher, which immediately obtained the name of "the Queen's Brilliant." This costly decoration consisted of an octagonal framework of large diamonds, divided into sections by lesser stones, each enclosing a portrait in enamel of one of the princes of her house, beneath which hung three immense pear-shaped pearls. The King was attired in a vest and haut-de-chausses of white satin, elaborately embroidered with silk and gold, and a black cape;* and wore upon his head the velvet *toque* that had been introduced at the French court by Henry III., to which a string of costly pearls was attached by a star of diamonds. Nor were the ladies and nobles of the royal retinue very inferior in the splendour of their appearance even to the monarch and his bride; feathers waved, and jewels flashed on every side; silks and velvets swept the marble floor; and the brilliant uniforms of the royal guard were seen in startling contrast with the uncovered shoulders of the court dames, which were laden with

quis d'Allière, and was of an ancient and noble house. He distinguished himself so greatly by his mental and moral qualities, as to secure the confidence and regard of Henry IV., who, in 1598, obtained for him a cardinal's hat; and in the following year he was created Archbishop of Bordeaux, in which city he died in 1628.

* Cayet, p. 191.

gems; while, to complete the gorgeousness of the picture, the high altar blazed with light, and wrought gold, and precious stones; and the magnificent robes of the prelates and priests who surrounded the shrine, formed a centre worthy of the rich framework by which it was enclosed.

At the termination of the ceremony, gold and silver coins were thrown to the crowd, and the procession returned to the palace in the same order as it had reached the church.

Great, however, as was the satisfaction which Henry IV. had publicly expressed at his marriage, and lavish as were the encomiums that he had passed upon the grace and beauty of his wife, it is, nevertheless, certain that he by no means permitted this legitimate admiration to interfere with his passion for Madame de Verneuil, to whom he constantly dispatched couriers, charged with both letters and presents; and whom he even permitted to speak of the Queen in her replies in a disrespectful manner. But the crowning proof of the inequality of the struggle which was about to exist between the wife and the mistress, was the departure of the King from Lyons on the 18th of December, the second day after his marriage;* when, announcing his intention of travelling post to Paris, he left the Queen and her suite to follow at their leisure. That the haughty spirit of Marie de Medicis was stung by this abrupt abandonment, and that her woman-pride revolted, will admit

* L'Etoile, vol. ii, p. 546.

of no doubt; nor is it wonderful that her indignation and jealousy should have been aroused when she discovered that, instead of pursuing his way to the capital, where the public arrangements necessitated by the peace with Savoy which he had just concluded, required his presence, the King had embarked at Roanne, and then proceeded from Briare where he landed, to Fontainebleau; whence on the morrow, after dining at Villeneuve, he had travelled at once to Verneuil, and remained three days before he entered Paris. Nor even after his arrival in the capital, was his conduct such as to reassure her delicacy; for Bassompierre has left it upon record that the newly-wedded sovereign took up his abode with M. de Montglat, at the priory of St. Nicolas-du-Louvre, where he constantly entertained ladies at supper, as well as several of his confidential courtiers.*

So singular and insulting a commencement of her married life was assuredly well calculated to alarm the dignity of the Tuscan Princess; and even brief as had been her residence in France, she had already several individuals about her person who did not suffer her to remain in ignorance of the movements of her royal consort; while, unhappily for her own peace, her Italian followers —revolted by an indifference on the part of the monarch which they considered as an insult to their mistress— instead of endeavouring to allay the irritation which she did not attempt to conceal, exasperated her feelings by the vehemence of their indignation. It was indeed but

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 25.

too manifest that the favourite retained all her influence; and the arrangements which had been formally made for the progress of the Queen to the capital involved so much delay, that it was not possible for her to remain blind to the fact that they had been organized with the view of enabling the monarch to enjoy uninterruptedly for a time the society of his mistress. In consequence of these perpetual stoppages on the road, the harangues to which she was condemned to listen, and the dreary ceremonies to which she was condemned, it was not until the 1st of February, 1601, that Marie de Medicis reached Nemours, where she was met by the King, who conducted her to Fontainebleau, at which palace the royal couple made a sojourn of five or six days; and, finally, on the 9th of the month, the young Queen entered Paris, where the civic authorities were anxious to afford to her a magnificent state reception; a purpose which was, however, negatived by the monarch, who alleged as his reason the enormous outlay that they had previously made upon similar occasions, and who commanded that the ceremony should be deferred.* Whatever may have been the real motive of Henry for exhibiting this new slight towards his royal bride, it is certain that the partisans of Marie did not fail to attribute it to the malevolence of Madame de Verneuil; and thus another subject of animosity was added to the list.

Under these circumstances, the Queen entered the metropolitan city of her new kingdom without any

* L'Etoile, vol. ii, p. 549.

of that pomp which had characterized her progress through the provinces; and alighted at the residence of M. de Gondy,* where the princesses and the principal ladies of the court andcity hastened to pay their respects to her Majesty on her arrival.

It was rumoured that one motive for the visit of the King to Verneuil had been his anxiety to induce the insolent favourite (whom he resolved to present to the Queen in order that she might be authorized to maintain her place at court) to treat her new sovereign with becoming respect; and with a view to render her presentation as dignified as possible, he commanded the Duchess de Nemours† to officiate as her sponsor. The pride of Anne de Savoie revolted, however, against the office which was assigned to her; and she ventured respectfully to intimate her reluctance to undertake so

* Jerome (or Albert) de Gondy, peer of France, knight of the King's Orders, and first gentleman of the bedchamber, occupied the hôtel, which was subsequently known as the Hôtel de Condé. He enjoyed the confidence of Catherine de Medicis and Charles IX. so fully that he had the honour of espousing, in the name of that monarch, the Princess Elizabeth of Austria, daughter of the Emperor Maximilian II. At the coronation of Henry III., he represented the person of the Constable; and at that of Henry IV., he was proxy for the Count of Toulouse.

† Anne d'Este, duchess de Nemours, was the mother of the Duke de Mayenne, and grandmother of the young Duke de Guise who aspired to the throne. She was first married to François de Lorraine, Duke de Guise, and subsequently to Jacques de Savoie, Duke de Nemours, whose son, after his decease, also pretended to the crown.

onerous an office; alleging as her reason that such a measure on her part must inevitably deprive her of the confidence of her royal mistress. Nevertheless, the King insisted on her obedience;* and, accordingly, the mortified duchess was compelled to lead the mistress of the monarch into the circle, and to name her to the agitated and outraged Queen. Marie de Medicis in this trying emergency was sustained by her Italian blood; and although her lip quivered, she vouchsafed no other token of displeasure; but after coldly returning the curtsey of the favourite, who was blazing with jewels and radiant with triumph, she turned abruptly aside to converse with one of the court ladies, leaving the marquise still standing before her, as though she had suddenly become unconscious of her existence. Nor did the Duchess de Nemours receive a more gracious welcome; when, having ventured to interpose in the conversation, she sought the eye of the Queen; for that eye was instantly averted; and she became aware that she had in truth incurred the displeasure which she had so justly apprehended.

But although the high-born and exemplary duchess shrank from the anger of her young sovereign, the *parvenue* marquise was far from feeling equally abashed.

* One historian (*Sauval. Gallerie des Rois de France*, vol. i.) asserts that the King himself presented his mistress to his wife; but he is unsupported in this statement save by Bassompierre, who also says: "The King presented Madame de Verneuil to her, who was graciously received." (*Mémoires*, p. 25.) Every other authority, however, contradicts this assertion, which is indeed too monstrous to be credible.

With a steady step and a proud carriage she advanced a pace nearer to Marie, and in her turn took up the thread of the discourse; nor did the haughtiness of the Queen's deportment disturb her serenity for a moment. The great fascination of Madame de Verneuil existed, as we have already remarked, in her extraordinary wit, and the vivacity of her conversation; while so ably did she on this occasion profit by her advantage, that the disgust of Marie was gradually changed into wonder; and when, at the close of one of her most brilliant sallies, the insolent favourite even carried her audacity so far as to address her royal mistress personally, the Queen was startled into a reply.* She soon, however, recovered her self-possession; and pleading fatigue, broke up the circle by retiring to her own apartments.

The mortification of Madame de Nemours, whose highest ambition had been to secure the affection of her new sovereign, and whose pride had been sorely wounded by the undignified office that she had been compelled to fulfil, had not, however, yet reached its culminating point; for as on the approach of the King, who was in his turn preparing to withdraw, she awaited some acknowledgment of the submission with which she had obeyed his commands, she was startled to see a frown gather upon his brow as their eyes met; and still more so to hear herself rebuked for the ungracious manner in which she had performed her task; an exhibition of

* L'Etoile, vol. i, p. 550.

ill-will to which, as he averred, Madame de Verneuil was solely indebted for the coldness of her reception.

The duchess curtseyed in silence; and Henry, without any other salutation, slowly pursued his way to the ante-room, followed by the officers of his household.

On the 12th of the month the Queen changed her residence, and took up her abode in the house of Zamet,* where she was to remain until the Louvre was prepared for her reception; a precaution which Henry had utterly neglected; and on the 15th she at length found herself established in the palace which had been opened to her with so much apparent reluctance. On the morrow Marie appeared in the costume of the French court,† with certain modifications which at once became popular. Like those by whom she was now surrounded, she wore her bosom considerably exposed, but her back and shoulders were veiled by a deep ruff which immediately obtained the name of the "Medicis;" and which bore a considerable resemblance to a similar decoration much in vogue during the sixteenth century. The "Medicis" was composed of rich lace, stiffened and supported by wire, and rose behind the neck to the enormous height of twelve inches.‡ The dress to which this ruff was attached was of the most gorgeous description, the

* This residence, which was situated near the Bastille, and subsequently known as the Hôtel de Lesdiguières, was the same in which *la belle Gabrielle* had breathed her last.

† Bassompierre, Mém., p. 25.

‡ Wraxall, History of France, vol. vi, p. 187.

materials employed being either cloth of gold or silver, or velvet trimmed with ermine; while chains of jewels confined it across the breast, descending from thence to the waist, where they formed a chatelaine reaching to the feet. Nor did the young Queen even hesitate to sacrifice to the prejudices of her new country, the magnificent hair which had excited so much astonishment on her arrival; but, in conformity with the taste of the French court, instead of suffering it, as she had previously done, to flow loosely over her shoulders, or to display its luxuriant braids like a succession of glossy diadems around her head, she caused it to be closely cut, and arranged in stiff rows of thickly powdered curls.

Hitherto, since the accession of Henry IV. the French court had been one of the least splendid in Europe; if, indeed, it could in reality have been said to exist at all; a circumstance to which many causes had conduced. During his separation from Marguerite, and before his second marriage, Henry had cared little for the mere display of royalty. His previous poverty had accustomed him to many privations as a sovereign, which he had sought to compensate by self-indulgence as a man; and thus he made a home in the houses of the most wealthy of his courtiers, such as Zamet, Gondy, and other dissipated and convenient sycophants, with whom he could fling off the trammels of rank, and indulge in the ruinously high play, or other still more objectionable amusements to which he was addicted. On the arrival of the Tuscan princess, however, all was changed; and,

as though he sought to compensate to her by splendour and display for the mortifications which awaited her private life, the King began forthwith to revive the traditional magnificence of the court.

Two days after their arrival at the Louvre, Henry conducted his Queen to the royal palaces of Fontainebleau and St. Germain; and on the 18th of the month, their Majesties, attended by the whole of their respective households, and accompanied by all the princes and great nobles then resident in the capital, partook of a superb banquet at the Arsenal, given by Sully in honour of his appointment as Grand-Master of the Artillery. At this festival the minister, casting aside the gravity of his functions and the dignity of his rank, and even forgetful as it would appear of the respect which he owed to his new sovereign, not satisfied with pressing upon his guests the costly viands that had been prepared for them, no sooner perceived that the Italian ladies of her Majesty's suite were greatly attracted by the wine of Arbois, of which they were partaking freely, quite unconscious of its potency, than he caused the decanters containing the water that they mingled with it to be re-filled with another wine of equal strength, but so limpid as to be utterly undistinguishable to the eye from the purer liquid for which it had been substituted. The consequences of this cruel pleasantry may be inferred; the heat, the movement, and the noise by which they were surrounded, together with the increased thirst caused by the insidious draughts that they were unconsciously imbibing, only induced the unfortunate Florentines to recur the more

perseveringly to their refreshing libations; and at length the results became so apparent as to attract the notice of the King, who, already prepossessed like Sully himself against the Queen's foreign retinue, laughed heartily at a treachery which he appeared to consider as the most amusing feature of the entertainment.*

During the succeeding days several ballets were danced by the young nobles of the court; and a tournament, open to all comers, and at which the Queen presented the prizes to the victors, was held at the Pont-au-Change.

At the close of Lent, the Duchess de Bar the King's sister, and her father-in-law the Duke de Lorraine, arrived in France to welcome the new sovereign; who, together with her consort, met them at Monceaux, which estate, lately the property of *la belle Gabrielle*, Henry had, after her arrival in the capital, presented to his wife. Here the court festivals were renewed; and had the heart and mind of Marie been at ease, her life must have seemed rather like a brilliant dream than a sober reality. Such, however, was far from being the case; for already the seeds of domestic discord which had been sown before her marriage were beginning to germinate. Madame de Verneuil was absent from the court; and it was evident to every individual of whom it was composed, that the King rather tolerated than shared in the gaieties by which he was surrounded.

Bassompierre relates that during this sojourn at

* L'Etoile, v. ii, pp. 550, 551.

Monceaux, while Henry was standing apart with himself, M. de Sully, and the Chancellor, he suddenly informed them that the favourite had confided to him a proposal of marriage which she had received from a prince, on condition that she should be enabled to bring with her a dowry of a hundred thousand crowns; and inquired if they would advise him to sacrifice so large a sum for such a purpose. "Sire," replied M. de Bellièvre; "I am of opinion that you would do well to give the young lady the hundred thousand crowns in order that she may secure the match." And when Sully with his usual prudence remarked that it was more easy to talk of such an amount than to procure it, the Chancellor continued, heedless of the interruption: "Nay more, Sire; I am equally of opinion that you had better give two or even three hundred thousand, if less will not suffice. Such is my advice."*

It is needless to say that it was not followed.

The only amusement in which Henry IV. indulged freely and earnestly, was play; and he was so reckless a gamester, that at no period has the court of France been so thoroughly demoralized by that frightful vice as throughout his reign. Not only did his own example corrupt those immediately about him, but the rage for gaming gradually pervaded all classes. The nobility staked their estates where money failed; the citizens trafficked in cards and dice when they should have been

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 25.

employed in commerce or in science; the very valets gambled in the halls, and the pages in the ante-chambers. Play became the one great business of life throughout the capital; and enormous sums were won and lost which changed the entire destiny of families. One or two traits will suffice to prove this, and we will then dismiss the subject. In the year 1607, M. de Bassompierre relates in his Memoirs, that being unable from want of funds to purchase a new and befitting costume in which to appear at the christening of the Dauphin, he nevertheless gave an order to his tailor to prepare him a dress upon which the outlay was to be fourteen thousand crowns; his actual resources amounting at that moment only to seven hundred; and that he had no sooner done so than he proceeded with this trifling sum to the hôtel of the Duke d'Epernon, where he won five thousand; while before the completion of the costume, he had not only gained a sufficient amount to discharge the debt thus wantonly incurred, but, as he adds, with a self-gratulation worthy of a better cause; "also a diamond-hilted sword of the value of five thousand crowns, and five or six thousand more with which to amuse myself."*

In 1609, only one year later, L'Etoile has left on record a still more astounding and degrading fact. "In this month," (March) he says, "several academies of play have been established, where citizens of all ages risk considerable sums; a circumstance which proves not only

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 50.

an abundance of means, but also the corruption of morals. The son of a merchant has been seen at one sitting to lose sixty thousand crowns, although he had only inherited twenty thousand from his father; and a man named Jonas has hired a house in the Faubourg St. Germain, in order to hold one of these academies for a fortnight during the fair, and for this house he has given fourteen hundred francs."*

D'Aubigny and several other chroniclers bear similar testimony; and while Bassompierre boasts of having won five hundred thousand pistoles in one year, (each pistole being little inferior in value to our own sovereign,) he nevertheless gives us plainly to understand that the King was a more reckless gamester than himself; a fact corroborated moreover by Sully, who tells us in his Memoirs: "The sums, at least the principal ones, that I employed on the personal expenses of Henry, were twenty-two thousand pistoles, for which he sent to me on the 18th of January, 1609, and which he had lost at play; a hundred thousand livres to one party, and fifty-one thousand to another, likewise play debts, due to Edward Fernandès, a Portuguese." * * * * * "A thousand pistoles for future play: Henry at first took only five hundred, but he subsequently sent Beringhen for the remainder for a different purpose. I carried him a thousand more for play when I went with the Chancellor to Fontainebleau."†

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 505, 506.

† Sully, Mém., vol. vii, pp. 180, 181.

Only a short time subsequent to the establishment of the court at the Louvre, what neither the desire and authority of the King himself, nor the arts of his mistress had been able to accomplish, was achieved through the agency of the Queen's favourite attendant, Leonora Galigaï,* who had accompanied her royal mistress and foster-sister from Italy at the period of her marriage. On the formation of the Queen's household, Henry had, among other appointments, honoured Madame de Richelieu† with the post of Mistress of the Robes; but Marie de Medicis having decided on bestowing this charge upon Leonora, refused to permit the countess to perform the duties of her office, and requested the King to transfer it to her Italian *protégée*. This, however, was a concession to which Henry would not consent; and while the Queen persisted in not permitting the services of Madame de Richelieu, her royal bridegroom as pertinaciously negatived the appointment of the *parvenue* lady of honour. The high-born countess bore the affront thus offered to her with the complacent dignity befitting her proud station; but such was far

* Leonora Dori, otherwise Galigaï, was the daughter of the nurse of Marie de Medicis, who was the wife of a carpenter, and she had consequently sprung from the very dregs of the people. By her great talent and insinuating manners, she had however succeeded, not only in securing the affection of her royal patroness, but also in exerting an influence over her actions never attained by any other individual.

† Suzanne de la Porte, wife of François du Plessis, Seigneur de Richelieu, knight of the royal Orders, and grand provost of France.

from being the case with the ambitious and mortified Leonora, who had not been a week at the French court ere she became aware that all the Italian followers of the Queen were peculiarly obnoxious both to the King and his minister; and who felt that should she fail to push her fortunes upon the instant, she might one day be compelled to leave France as poor and as powerless as she had entered it. Not contented, therefore, with urging her royal mistress to persevere in her resolution of rejecting the attendance of Madame de Richelieu, she began to speculate upon the most feasible measures to be adopted in order to secure her own succession to the coveted dignity; and after considerable reflection, she became convinced that this could only be accomplished through the assistance of the Marquise de Verneuil. Once assured of the fact, Leonora did not hesitate; but, instead of avoiding, as she had hitherto done, the advances of the favourite, who, aware of her unlimited power over the mind of the Queen, had on several occasions treated her with a courtesy by no means warranted by her position at the court, she began to court the favour of the marquise in as marked a manner as she had previously slighted it; and ere long the intrigue of the two favourites was brought to a successful issue. Each stood in need of the other, and a compact was accordingly entered into between them. Madame de Verneuil, whose pride was piqued by her exclusion from the royal circle, was desirous to gain at any price the countenance of Marie,

and to be admitted to her private assemblies, where alone she could carry out her more extended plan of ambition; while the wily Italian, rendered only the more pertinacious by difficulty, and anxious moreover to secure a post which would at all times enable her to remain about the person of the Queen, thought no price too great, even the dishonour of her royal foster-sister, to obtain her object; and thus a mutual promise was made; the marquise pledging herself that, in the event of the Queen recognising her right to attend her receptions, and treating her with the courtesy and consideration due to the rank conferred upon her by the King, she would effect the appointment courted by Leonora; while the Signora Galigaï with equal confidence promised in her turn that she would without delay cause Madame de Verneuil to receive a summons to the Queen's presence.

Nor did either of these ladies over-estimate the amount of her influence; for the monarch no sooner learnt that the reception of his mistress by the haughty and indignant Princess could be purchased by a mere slight to Madame la Grande Provoste, than he consented to sanction the appointment of the Italian *suivante* of Marie to the post of honour; while Leonora soon succeeded by her tears and entreaties in wringing from her royal mistress a reluctant acquiescence to her request.

Thus then, as before stated, a hollow peace was patched up between the unequal rivals; and Madame de Verneuil at length found herself in possession of a

folding seat in the Queen's reception room; while her coadjutrice triumphantly took her place among the noblest ladies of the land: but scarcely had this result been accomplished, when Henry, profiting by so unhoped-for an opportunity of gratifying the vanity of the favourite, assigned to her a suite of apartments in the Louvre immediately above those of the Queen; and little, if at all, inferior to them in magnificence.

This, however, was an affront which Marie de Medicis could not brook; and she accordingly, with her usual independence of spirit, expressed herself in no measured terms upon the subject, particularly to such of her ladies at were likely to repeat her comments to the marquise. The latter retorted by assuming all the airs of royalty; and by assembling about her a little court, for which that of the Queen herself was frequently forsaken, especially by the monarch, who found the brilliant circle of the favourite, wherein he always met a warm and enthusiastic welcome, infinitely more to his taste than the formal etiquette, and reproachful frowns by which his presence in that of his royal consort was usually signalised.

Nor could the annoyance of the proud Florentine princess be subject of astonishment to any rightly-constituted mind. The position was a monstrous and an unnatural one. Both the wife and the mistress were about to become mothers; and the whole court was degraded by so unblushing an exhibition of the profligacy of the monarch. Still, however, the French ladies of the household forebore to censure their sovereign; and even

sought to persuade the outraged Queen that when once she had given a Dauphin to France, the favourite would be compelled to leave the palace; but Marie's Italian followers were far less scrupulous, and expressed their indignation in no measured terms. The Queen, wounded in her most sacred feelings, became gradually colder to the marquise; who, as though she had only awaited this relapse to sting her still more deeply than she had yet done, retorted the slights which she constantly received by declaring that "the Florentine," as she insolently designated her royal mistress, was not the legal or lawful wife of the King, whose written promise, still in her possession, he was, as she asserted, bound to fulfil should she bear him a son. This surpassing assurance no sooner reached the ears of Marie de Medicis than she once more forbade Madame de Verneuil her presence; but the marquise, strong in her impunity, merely replied by an epigram, and consoled herself for her exclusion from the Queen's private circle by assuming more state and magnificence than before; and by collecting in her saloons the prettiest women and the most reckless gamblers that the capital could produce. Thus attracted, the infatuated monarch became her constant guest; and his neglected wife, in weak health, and with an agonised heart, saw herself abandoned for a wanton who had set a price upon her virtue, and who made a glory of her shame.

Poor Marie! whatever were her faults as a woman, they were bitterly expiated both as a wife and as a mother!

Vain were all the efforts of the King on the one

hand and those of Leonora on the other to terminate this new misunderstanding; the Queen was coldly resolute, and the marquise insolently indifferent; nor would a reconciliation, in all probability, ever again have taken place, had not the interests of the Mistress of the Robes once more required it; when her influence over the mind of her royal foster-sister sufficed to overcome every obstacle.

Among the numerous Florentines who composed the suite of Marie de Medicis was Concino Concini,* a gentleman of her household, whose extreme personal beauty had captivated the heart of Leonora; while she saw, as she believed, in his far-reaching ambition and flexile character the very elements calculated, in conjunction with her own firmer nature and higher intellect, to lead her on to the most lofty fortunes. It is probable, however, that had la Galigaï continued to attend the Queen in her original and obscure office of waiting-woman, Concini, who was of better blood than herself, and who could not moreover be supposed to find any attraction in the diminutive figure and sallow countenance of his countrywoman, would never have been induced to consent to such an alliance; but Leonora was now on the high road to wealth and honour, while his own position was scarcely defined; and thus ere long the consent of the Queen to their marriage was solicited by Concini himself.

Marie,, who foresaw that by this arrangement, she

* Concino Concini was the son of a notary, who, by his talent, had risen to be secretary of state at Florence.

should keep both parties in her service: and who, in the desolation of a disappointed spirit clung each day more closely to her foreign attendants, immediately accorded the required permission; but it was far otherwise with the King, who had no sooner been informed of the projected union, than he sternly forbade it; to the great indignation of his consort, who was deeply mortified by this new interference with her personal household, and saddened by the spectacle of her favourite's unaffected wretchedness. In vain did the Queen expostulate, and urged by Leonora and her suitor, even entreat of Henry to relent; all her efforts to this effect remained fruitless; and she was at length compelled to declare to the sorrowing woman that she had no alternative save to submit to the will of the King.

Such, however, was far from being the intention of the passionate Italian. Too unattractive to entertain any hope from her own pleadings with Henry himself, she once more turned in this new difficulty to Madame de Verneuil; who, in order to display how little she had been mortified or annoyed by the coldness of the Queen, and at the same time to prove to her that where the earnest entreaties of the latter had failed to produce any effect, her own expressed wish would suffice to ensure success, immediately bade Leonora dry her eyes, and prepare her wedding-dress, as she would guarantee her prompt reception of the royal consent upon one condition, and that one so easy of accomplishment that she could not fail to fulfil it.

Marie de Medicis had been heard to declare that in the event of her becoming the mother of a Dauphin, she would, at the earliest possible period, dance a ballet in honour of the King, which should exceed in magnificence every exhibition of the kind that had hitherto been attempted; and the condition so lightly treated by the favourite was no less than her own appearance in the royal ballet, should it indeed take place. Even la Galigaï herself was startled by so astounding a proposition; but she soon discovered, from the resolute attitude assumed by the marquise, that her powerful intercession with the King was not otherwise to be secured; and it was consequently with even less of hope than apprehension that the agitated Mistress of the Robes kissed the hand of Madame de Verneuil, and assured her that she would leave no effort untried to obtain the consent of her royal mistress to her wishes. But when she had withdrawn, and was traversing the gallery which communicated with the apartments of Marie, she began to entertain serious misgivings: the pretension of the marquise was so monstrous, that, even conscious as she was of the extent of her own influence over her foster-sister, she almost dreaded to communicate the result of her interview, and nearly despaired of success; but with the resolute perseverance which formed so marked a feature in her character, she resolved to brave the utmost displeasure of the Queen rather than forego this last hope of an union with Concini. It was, nevertheless, drowned in tears, and with a trembling heart,

that she presented herself before Marie, as the voluntary bearer of this new and aggravated insult; while, incomprehensible as it must appear in this age, whatever may have been the arguments and entreaties of which she was clever enough to avail herself, it is at least certain that they were ultimately successful; and that she was authorised by the Queen to communicate to Madame de Verneuil her Majesty's willingness to accede to her request, provided that the marquise pledged herself in return to perform her portion of the contract.

That her partiality for her early friend induced Marie de Medicis to make, in this instance, a most unbecoming concession, is certain; while it is no less matter of record that, probably to prevent any opportunity of retractation on the part of Madame de Verneuil, she lavished upon her from that day the most flattering marks of friendship; and publicly treated her with a distinction which was envied by many of the greatest ladies at court, even although it excited the censure of all.*

The comparative tranquillity which succeeded this new adjustment of the differences between the Queen and the marchioness continued until the month of September, on the 17th day of which Marie became the mother of a Dauphin (subsequently Louis XIII.), at the palace of Fontainebleau; where, as had already been the case at the Louvre, the apartments of the

* Dreux du Radier, Mémoires des Reines et Régentes de France, vol. vi, p. 81. Conti, Amours du Grand Alcandre, Cologne edition, 1652, p. 41.

favourite adjoined her own. Nothing could exceed the delight of Henry IV. at the birth of his heir. He stood at the lower end of the Queen's apartment, surrounded by the princes of the blood, to each of whom the royal infant was successively presented; and this ceremony was no sooner terminated than, bending over him with passionate fondness, he audibly invoked a blessing upon his head; and then placing his sword in the tiny hand as yet unable to grasp it: "May you use it, my son," he exclaimed, "to the glory of God, and in defence of your crown and people."* He next approached the bed of the Queen; "*M'amie,*" he said, tenderly, "Rejoice! God has given us what we asked."† Mezeray and Matthieu both assert that the birth of the Dauphin was preceded by an earthquake; which, with the usual superstition of the period, was afterwards declared to have been a forewarning of the ceaseless wars by which Europe was convulsed during his reign.‡

Rejoicings were general throughout the whole country; and were augmented by the fact that more than eighty years had elapsed since the birth of a successor to the crown who had been eligible to bear the title of Dauphin; Francis II. having come into the world before his father Henry II. was on the throne, who had himself only attained to that title after the

* Pérefixe, vol. ii, p. 346. L'Etoile, vol. ii, pp. 573, 574.

† Matthieu, vol. ii, p. 441.

‡ Mezeray, vol. x, p. 178.

death of his elder brother Francis, who was born in 1517.* Te Deums were chanted in all the churches; salvos of artillery were discharged at the Arsenal; fireworks, bonfires, and illuminations, made a city of flame of Paris for several successive nights; while joyous acclamations rent the air, and the gratified citizens congratulated each other as they perambulated the streets as though each had experienced some personal benefit. The fact that Anne of Austria, the daughter of Philip III. of Spain, was born only five days previous to the Dauphin, was another source of delight to the French people, who regarded the circumstance as an earnest of the future union of the two kingdoms; a prophecy which was afterwards fulfilled by the marriage of the two royal children.

We have already made more than one allusion to the belief in magic, sorcery and astrology, which at this period had obtained in France; and by which many, even of the most enlightened of her nobles and citizens suffered themselves to be trammelled and deluded; and however much we of the present day may be inclined to pity or to despise so great a weakness, we shall do well to remember that human progression during the last sixty years has been more marked and certain than that which had taken place in the lapse of the three previous centuries. It is true that there were a few strong-minded individuals even at the period of which we treat, who refused to submit their reason to the wild and illogical

* Daniel, vol. vii, p. 407.

superstitions which were rife about them; but these formed a very small portion of the aggregate population; and from the peasant in his hovel to the monarch on his throne, the plague-spot of credulity had spread and festered, until it presented a formidable feature in the history of the time. It is curious to remark that L'Etoile, the most common-place and unimaginative of chroniclers, who might well have been expected in his realism to treat such phantasies as puerile and absurd, seems to justify to his own mind the extreme penalties of the scaffold and the stake as a fitting punishment for sorcerers and magicians: declaring, as he records them in his usual terse and matter-of-fact style, to be dictated by justice, and essential to the repression of an intercourse between men and evil spirits.

Gabrielle d'Estrées was the dupe, if, indeed, not the victim, of her firm faith in astrology. She had been assured that "a child would prevent her from attaining the rank to which she aspired;"* and the predisposition of an excited nervous system, probably assisted the verification of the prophecy. The old Cardinal de Bourbon†

* Matthieu, Hist. de Henri IV., vol. i, p. 307.

† Charles I. de Bourbon, Cardinal-Archbishop of Rouen, legate of Avignon, abbé of St. Denis, of St. Germain-des-Près, of St. Ouen, of Ste. Catherine of Rouen, and of Orcamp, &c. was the son of Charles, Duke de Vendôme, and was born in 1523. After the death of Henry III., in 1589, he was proclaimed King by the Leaguers and the Duke de Mayenne, under the title of Charles X. Taken captive by Henry IV., of whom he was the

whom the Leaguers would fain have made their king, was seduced from his fidelity to the illustrious race from which he sprang by his weak reliance upon the predictions of soothsayers, who thus degraded him into the tool of the wily Duke de Guise;* while his nephew, Charles II., also a Cardinal,† even more infatuated than himself, had been impelled to believe that the disease which was rapidly sapping his existence, was the effect of the machinations of a court lady by whom he had been bewitched! Traitors found excuse for their treason in the assertion that they had been deluded by false predictions, or ensorcerised by magic;‡ princes were governed in their political movements by astral calculations;§ a grave minister details with complacency, although without comment, various anecdotes of the operation of the occult sciences,‖ and even makes them a study; while an European monarch, strong in the love of his people

paternal uncle, he was imprisoned at Fontenay, where he died, in 1594.

* De Thou, vol. xi, pp. 154, 155.

† Charles, the natural son of Anthony of Navarre and of Mademoiselle de la Beraudière de la Guiche, one of the maids of honour to Catherine de Medicis.

‡ Such was the plea of the Maréchal de Biron during his imprisonment in the Bastille.

§ Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, whose intellect had in other respects outrun his age, and whose shrewd good sense should have emancipated him from so gross an abuse of reason, never undertook any measure of importance without consulting the astrologers. See de Thou, vol. xiii, p. 538.

‖ See the Memoirs of Sully.

and his own bravery, suffers the predictions of soothsayers and prophets to cloud his mind, and to shake his purposes, even while he declares his contempt for all such delusions.*

That such was actually the case is proved by de Thou, who relates an extraordinary speech made by the King at the Louvre, in 1599, on the occasion of the promulgation of the Edict of Nantes, to the deputies of the Parliament of Paris; in the course of which he declared that, twenty-six years previously, when he was residing at the court of Charles IX., he was about to cast the dice with Henry of Lorraine, Duke de Guise, his relative, amid a large circle of nobles, when at the instant in which they were prepared to commence their game, drops of blood appeared upon the table, which were renewed without any apparent agency as fast as they were wiped away. Each party carefully ascertained that it could not proceed from any of the individuals present; and the phenomenon was so frequently repeated, that Henry, as he averred, at once amazed and disturbed, declined to persevere in the pastime, considering the circumstance as an evil omen.† Whatever may be the opinion of the reader as to the actual cause of this apparent prodigy, it is at least

* It is a certain fact that Henry IV., however he might verbally despise the pretensions of those who exercised what has been happily designated as the "black art," nevertheless admitted more than once a conviction of their mysterious privileges.

† De Thou, vol. x, p. 375.

certain that it was verified by subsequent events; as well as the extraordinary and multiplied prophecy that the King himself would meet his death in a coach.

Under these circumstances, combined with the almost universal credulity of the age and nation which he governed, it is scarcely matter of surprise that Henry IV., on so momentous an occasion as the birth of his son, should have sought, even while he feigned to disregard the result, to learn the after-destiny of the royal infant; and, accordingly, a few days subsequently, he commanded M. de la Rivière,* who publicly professed the science of judicial astrology, to draw the horoscope of the Dauphin with all the accuracy of which the operation was susceptible. The command was answered by an assurance from la Rivière that the work was already in progress; but as another week passed by without any communication from the seer, Henry became impatient, and again summoned him to his presence, in order to inquire the cause of the delay.

"Sire," replied la Rivière; "I have abandoned the undertaking, as I am reluctant to sport with a science

* M. de la Rivière had originally been the chief medical attendant of the Duke de Bouillon, who ceded him to Henry IV., by whom he was appointed his body-surgeon, in which office he succeeded M. d'Aliboust. He was born at Falaise, in Normandy, and was the son of Jean Ribel, professor of theology at Geneva. He himself, however, embraced the reformed religion, and died in 1605, sincerely regretted by the monarch, to whom his eminent talents and unwearied devotion had greatly endeared him.

whose secrets I have partially forgotten; and which I have, moreover, frequently found defective."

"I am not to be deceived by so idle a pretext;" said the King, who readily detected that the alleged excuse was a mere subterfuge; "you have no such scruples; but you have resolved not to reveal to me what you have ascertained, lest I should discover the fallacy of your pretended knowledge, or be angered by your prediction. Whatever may be the cause of your hesitation, however, I am resolved that you shall speak; and I command you, upon pain of my displeasure, to do so truthfully."

Still la Rivière excused himself, until perceiving that it would be dangerous to persevere in his pertinacity, he at length reluctantly replied: "Sire, your son will live to manhood, and will reign longer than yourself: but he will resemble you in no one particular. He will indulge his own opinions and caprices, and sometimes those of others. During his rule it will be safer to think than to speak. Ruin threatens your ancient institutions; all your measures will be overthrown. He will accomplish great deeds; will be fortunate in his undertakings; and will become the theme of all Christendom. He will have issue; and after his death more heavy troubles will ensue. This is all that you shall know from me, and even this is more than I had proposed to tell you."

The King remained for a time silent and thoughtful, after which he said coldly: "You allude to the Hugue-

nots, I see that well; but you only talk thus because you have their interests at heart."

"Explain my meaning as you please;" was the abrupt retort; "but you shall learn nothing more from me." And so saying, the uncompromising astrologer made a hurried salutation to the monarch, and withdrew.*

A fortnight after this extraordinary scene, another event took place at the Louvre, sufficiently interesting to Henry to wean his thoughts for a time even from the foreshadowed future of his successor. In an apartment immediately contiguous to that of the still convalescent Queen, Madame de Verneuil became in her turn the mother of a son, who was baptized with great ceremony, and received the names of Gaston Henry;† and this birth, which should have covered the King with shame, and roused the nation to indignation,

* Sully, Mém., vol. vi, pp. 46—49.

† Gaston Henry, the son of Henry IV. and of Henriette d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil, originally took orders, and became the incumbent of several abbeys, among others, that of St. Germain-des-Près. He was subsequently made Bishop of Metz, and bore that title for a considerable time. On the 1st of January, 1662, having been created a knight of the Order of the Holy Ghost, and in the following year a duke and peer, he took the name of Duke de Verneuil, and as such was sent to England, in 1665, as ambassador extraordinary. Finally, in 1666, Louis XIV. bestowed upon him the government of Languedoc, when he sold his church property, and married (in 1668) Charlotte Seguier, the widow of Maximilian-François de Béthune III., Duke de Sully. He died without issue, at Versailles, on the 28th of May, 1682.

when the circumstances already detailed are considered, was but the pretext for new rejoicings.

On the 27th of October, the Dauphin made his public entry into Paris. The infant Prince occupied a sumptuous cradle presented to him by the Grand-Duchess of Florence; and beside him, in an open litter, sat Madame de Montglat, his gouvernante, and the royal nurse. The provost of the merchants and the metropolitan sheriffs met him at some distance from the gates, and harangued him at considerable length; and Madame de Montglat having replied in his name to the oration, the *cortège* proceeded to the house of Zamet. Two days subsequently he was conveyed in the same state to St. Germain-en-Laye; where, in order that the people might see him with greater facility, the nurse carried him in her arms. The enthusiasm of the crowd, by which his litter was constantly surrounded, knew no bounds; and the heart of that exulting mother which was fated afterwards to be broken by his unnatural abandonment, beat high with gratitude to Heaven, as her ear drank in the enthusiastic shouts of the multitude, and remembered that it was she who had bestowed this well-appreciated blessing upon France.

CHAPTER III.

[1602.]

COURT FESTIVITIES — THE QUEEN'S BALLET — A GALLANT PRELATE — A POETICAL ALMONER — INSOLENCE OF THE ROYAL FAVOURITE — UNHAPPINESS OF THE QUEEN—WEAKNESS OF HENRY—INTRIGUE OF MADAME DE VILLARS—THE KING QUARRELS WITH THE FAVOURITE—THEY ARE RECONCILED—MADAME DE VILLARS IS EXILED, AND THE PRINCE DE JOINVILLE SENT TO JOIN THE ARMY IN HUNGARY—MORTIFICATION OF THE QUEEN — HER WANT OF JUDGMENT — NEW DISSENSION IN THE ROYAL MÉNAGE—SULLY ENDEAVOURS TO RESTORE PEACE—MADEMOISELLE DE SOURDIS—THE COURT REMOVES TO BLOIS —ROYAL RUPTURE — A BEWILDERED MINISTER — MARIE AND HER FOSTER-SISTER — CONSPIRACY OF THE DUKES DE BOUILLON AND DE BIRON—PARALLEL BETWEEN THE TWO NOBLES—THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE —INGRATITUDE OF BIRON—HE IS BETRAYED—HIS ARROGANCE—HE IS SUMMONED TO THE CAPITAL TO JUSTIFY HIMSELF—HE REFUSES TO OBEY THE ROYAL SUMMONS—HENRY SENDS A MESSENGER TO COMMAND HIS PRESENCE AT COURT—PRECAUTIONARY MEASURES OF SULLY—THE PRESIDENT JEANNIN PREVAILS OVER THE OBSTINACY OF BIRON—DOUBLE TREACHERY OF LA FIN—THE KING ENDEAVOURS TO INDUCE BIRON TO CONFESS HIS CRIME—ARREST OF THE DUKE DE BIRON AND THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE—THE ROYAL SOIRÉE—A TIMELY CAUTION—BIRON IS MADE PRISONER BY VITRY, AND THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE BY PRASLIN—THEY ARE CONVEYED SEPARATELY TO THE BASTILLE—EXULTATION OF THE CITIZENS — FIRMNESS OF THE KING — VIOLENCE OF BIRON — TARDY REPENTANCE — TRIAL OF BIRON — A SCENE IN THE BASTILLE — CONDEMNATION OF THE DUKE—HE IS BEHEADED—THE SUBORDINATE CONSPIRATORS ARE PARDONED—THE DUKE DE BOUILLON RETIRES TO TURENNE—REFUSES TO APPEAR AT COURT—EXECUTION OF THE BARON DE FONTENELLES—A SALUTARY LESSON—THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE IS RESTORED TO LIBERTY — REVOLT OF THE PRINCE DE JOINVILLE — HE IS TREATED WITH CONTEMPT BY THE KING — HE IS IMPRISONED BY THE DUKE DE GUISE—REMOVAL OF THE COURT TO FONTAINEBLEAU—LEGITIMATION OF THE SON OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—UNHAPPINESS OF THE QUEEN — SHE IS CONSOLED BY SULLY — BIRTH OF THE PRINCESS ELIZABETH OF FRANCE—DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE QUEEN—SŒUR ANGE.

CHAPTER III.

[1602.]

THE convalescence of the Queen was the signal for a succession of festivities, and the whole winter was spent in gaiety and dissipation; banquets, ballets, and hunting-parties, succeeded each other with bewildering rapidity; and so magnificent were several of the court-festivals that even some of the gravest historians of the time did not disdain to record them. The most brilliant of the whole, however, and that which will best serve to exemplify the taste of the period, was the ballet to which allusion has already been made as given in honour of the King by his royal consort, and in which Marie de Medicis herself appeared. In order to heighten its effect, she had selected fifteen of the most beautiful women of the court, Madame de Verneuil being, according to the royal promise, one of the number; and the first part of the exhibition took place at the Louvre. The entertainment commenced with the entrance of Apollo and

the nine Muses into the great hall of the palace, which was thronged with native and foreign princes, ambassadors, and ministers, in the midst of whom sat the King with the Papal Nuncio on his right hand. The god and his attendants sang the glory of the monarch, the pacificator of Europe; and each stanza terminated with the somewhat fulsome and ungraceful words:

> " Il faut que tout vous rend hommage,
> Grand Roi, miracle de notre âge."

Thence the whole gay and gallant company proceeded to the Hôtel de Guise, where the eight maids of honour of the Queen performed the second act; and this was no sooner concluded, than the brilliant revellers removed to the archiepiscopal palace, where the Queen appeared in person upon the scene, with her suite divided into four quadrilles. Marie herself represented Venus, and led by the hand César de Vendôme* attired as Cupid; when the splendour of her jewels produced so startling an effect that murmurs of astonishment and admiration ran through the hall. Gratified at the sensation caused by the unexampled magnificence and

* César de Vendôme was the son of Henry IV. and *la belle Gabrielle*. He became Governor of Brittany, and superintendent-chief of the national navigation. Henry also bestowed on him as an appanage the duchy of Vendôme. He married the daughter of Philip Emmanuel of Lorraine, Duke de Mercœur, by whom he had three children: Isabelle, who became the wife of Charles Amédée, Duke de Nemours; Louis, who died single; and Francis, Duke de Beaufort.

grace of his royal consort, Henry smilingly inquired of the Nuncio "if he had ever before seen so fine a squadron?"

"*Bellissimo e pericolosissimo!*" was the reply of the gallant prelate.

Each of the ladies composing the party of the Queen represented a *virtue;* an arrangement which, when it is remembered that Madame de Verneuil was one of the chosen, rendered their attributes at least equivocal. This royal ballet was nevertheless considered worthy of a poetical immortality by Berthault,* a popular bard of the day, who left little behind him worthy of preservation, but who enjoyed great vogue among the fashionables of the court at that period. Its most important result was, however, the marriage of Concini and Leonora; to which, in consideration of the honour done to the favourite by the Queen, Henry withdrew his opposition; even authorising his royal consort to present rich presents to the bride, and to celebrate the nuptials with considerable ceremony.†

All these royal diversions were suddenly and disagreeably terminated some months afterwards by an

* Jean de Berthault (or Bertaut) was born at Caen in 1552. He was first-almoner of Catherine de Medicis, Abbé of Aulnai, and subsequently Bishop of Séez. He was a pupil of Ronsard, and a friend of Desportes. He wrote a great number of sacred and profane poems, psalms, and sonnets. He also produced a "Funeral Oration on Henry IV.," and a "Translation of St. Ambroise." He died in 1611.

† Amours du Grand Alcandre, p. 41.

intrigue which once more threw the King and his courtiers into a state of agitation and discomfort.

As regards Marie de Medicis herself, she had long ceased to derive any gratification from the splendid festivities of which she was one of the brightest ornaments; her ill-judged indulgence, far from exciting the gratitude of Madame de Verneuil, having rendered the insolent favourite still more arrogant and overbearing. To such an extent, indeed, did the marquise carry her presumption, that she affected to believe herself indebted for the forbearance of the Queen to the conviction of the latter that she had a superior claim upon the monarch to her own; and while she permitted herself to comment upon the words, actions, and tastes, and even upon the personal peculiarities of her royal mistress, she declared her conviction of the legality of the written promise obtained by her from the King; and announced her determination, now that she had become the mother of a son, to enforce its observance.

These monstrous pretensions, which were soon made known to the Queen, at once wounded and exasperated her feelings; and she anxiously awaited the moment when some new imprudence of the favourite should open the eyes of the monarch to her delinquency, as she had already become aware that mere argument on her own part would avail nothing.

Several writers, and among them even female ones, yielding to the *prestige* attached to the name of Henry IV., have sought the solution of all his domestic

discomfort in the "Italian jealousy" of Marie de Medicis; but surely it is not difficult to excuse it under circumstances of such extraordinary trial. Marie was a wife, a mother, and a Queen; and in each of these characters she was insulted and outraged. As a wife, she saw her rights invaded—as a mother, the legitimacy of her son questioned—and as a Queen her dignity compromised. What very inferior causes have produced disastrous effects even in private life! The only subject of astonishment which can be rationally entertained, is the comparative patience with which at this period of her career she submitted to the humiliations that were heaped upon her.

In vain did she complain to her royal consort of the insulting calumnies of Madame de Verneuil; he either affected to disbelieve that she had been guilty of such absurd assumption, or reproached Marie with a want of self-respect in listening to the idle tattle of eaves-droppers and sycophants; alleging that her foreign followers, spoiled by her indulgence, and encouraged by her credulity, were the scourge of his court; and that she would do well to dismiss them before they accomplished her own unhappiness. A hint to this effect always sufficed to silence the Queen, to whom the society and support of Leonora and her husband were becoming each day more necessary; and thus she devoured her tears, and stifled her wretchedness, trusting that the arrogance and presumption of the marquise would ultimately serve her better than her own remonstrances.

Such was the position of affairs when the intrigue to which allusion has been already made promised to produce the desired result; and it can create no surprise that Marie should eagerly indulge the hope of delivering herself from an obnoxious and formidable rival, when the opportunity presented itself of accomplishing so desirable an end without betraying her own agency.

During the lifetime of *la belle Gabrielle*, her sister, Juliette Hippolyte d'Estrées, Marquise de Cérisay, who, in 1597, became the wife of Georges de Brancas, Duke de Villars, had attracted the attention of the King, whose dissipated tastes were always flattered by novelty; although if we are to credit the statements of the Princess de Conti, this lady, so far from rivalling the beauty of her younger sister, had no personal charms to recommend her beyond *her youth and her hair.** Being as unscrupulous as the Duchess de Beaufort herself, Juliette exulted in the idea of captivating the King, and left no effort untried to secure her supposed conquest; but this caprice on the part of Henry was only momentary, and in his passion for Henriette d'Entragues, he soon forgot his passing fancy for Madame de Villars. The duchess herself, however, was far from being equally oblivious; and listening to the dictates of her ambition and self-love, she became persuaded that she was indebted to the marquise alone for the sudden coldness of the King; and accordingly she vowed an eternal hatred to the woman whom she

* Amours du Grand Alcandre, p. 42.

considered in the light of a successful rival. Up to the present period, anxious as she was to avenge her wounded vanity, she had been unable to secure an opportunity of revenge; but having at this particular moment won the affection of the Prince de Joinville,* who had been a former lover of Madame de Verneuil, and with whom, as she was well aware, he had maintained an active correspondence, she made his surrender of the letters of that lady the price of her own honour. For a time the Prince hesitated; he felt all the disloyalty of such a concession; but those were not times in which principle waged an equal war against passion; and the letters were ultimately placed in the possession of Madame de Villars.

The duchess was fully cognisant of the fact that it was from an impulse of self-preservation alone that M. de Joinville had been induced to forego his suit to the favourite, and to absent himself from the court; a consideration which should have aroused her delicacy as a woman; but she was by no means disposed to yield to so inconvenient a weakness; and she had consequently no sooner secured the coveted documents than she prepared to profit by her good fortune.

* Claude de Lorraine, Prince de Joinville, was the fourth son of Henry, Duke de Guise, surnamed the *Balafré*, brother of Charles, Duke de Mayenne, and of Louis, Cardinal de Guise. He married Marie de Rohan, Duchess de Chevreuse, the daughter of Hercules de Rohan, Duke de Montbazon, and peer of France, and was subsequently known as Duke de Chevreuse. He died in 1657.

Henriette d'Entragues had really loved the Prince—if indeed so venal and vicious a woman can be supposed capable of loving anything save herself—and thus the letters, which were transferred to Madame de Villars, many of them having been written immediately after their separation, were filled with regrets at his absence, professions of unalterable affection, and disrespectful expressions concerning the King and Queen; the latter of whom was ridiculed and slandered without pity. It is easy to imagine the triumphant joy of the duchess. She held her enemy at her mercy, and she had no inclination to be merciful. She read and re-read the precious letters; and finally, after deep reflection, her plans were matured.

The Princess de Conti was her personal friend, and was, moreover, attached to the household of the Queen, to whom Madame de Villars, from circumstances which require no comment, had hitherto been comparatively a stranger. Marie de Medicis, who had experienced little sympathy from the great ladies of the court, having thrown herself principally upon her Italian followers for society, had in consequence been cold and distant in her deportment to the French members of her circle; who, on their side, trammelled by the rigorous propriety of her conduct, were quite satisfied to be partially overlooked, in order that their own less scrupulous bearing might pass unnoticed by so rigid a censor; and thus, when, upon the earnest request of Madame de Villars to be introduced to the more intimate acquaintance of

the Queen, the Princess succeeded in obtaining for her the privilege of the *petites entrées* (unaware of the powerful passport to favour which she possessed), she found it difficult to account for the eagerness with which the ordinarily unapproachable Marie greeted the appearance, and courted the society of the astute duchess; nor did she for an instant dream that by facilitating the intercourse between them, she was undermining the fortunes of a brother whom she loved.

It appears extraordinary that of all the ladies about the Queen, Madame de Villars should have selected the sister of the Prince de Joinville to enable her to effect her purpose; but let her have acted from whatever motive she might, it is certain that day by day her favour became more marked; and the circumstance which most excited the surprise of Madame de Conti, was the fact that her *protégée* was often closeted with the Queen when, for reasons sufficiently obvious, she herself and even Leonora Galigaï were excluded. In encouraging the vengeance of her new friend, Marie was well aware that she was committing an imprudence from which the more long-sighted Florentine would have dissuaded her; and thus, with that impetuosity which was destined through life to be her scourge, she resolved only to consult her own feelings. The secret of this new discovery was consequently not divulged to her favourite; and as her cheek burned, and her eye flashed, while lingering over the insults to which she had been subjected by the unscrupulous mistress of the

monarch, she urged Madame de Villars to lose no time in communicating the contents of the obnoxious letters to her sovereign.

The undertaking was difficult as well as dangerous; and in the case of the duchess it required more than usual tact and caution. She had not only to encounter the risk of arousing the anger of Henry by accusing the woman whom he loved, but also to combat his wounded vanity when he should see his somewhat mature passion made a subject of ridicule, and, at the same time, to conceal her own motive for the treachery of which she was guilty. This threefold trial, even daring as she was, the duchess feared to hazard. In communicating the fatal letters to the Queen, she had calculated that the indignation and jealousy of the Italian princess would instigate her to take instant possession of so formidable a weapon against her most dangerous enemy, and to work out her own vengeance; but Marie had learnt prudence from past experience, and she was anxious to conceal her own agency in the cabal until she could avow it with a certainty of triumph. Perceiving the reluctance of Madame de Villars to take the initiative, she hastened to explain to her the suspicion which would naturally be engendered in the mind of the King, should he imagine that the affair had been preconcerted to satisfy her private animosity; and moreover suggested that the duchess should, in her interview with the monarch, carefully avoid even the mention of her name. Encouragement and entreaties followed this

caution; while a few rich presents sufficed to convince her auditor—and ultimately, Madame de Villars (who had too long waited patiently for such an opportunity of revenge to shrink from her purpose when it was secured to her), having gained the favour and confidence of the Queen at the expense of her rival, resolved to terminate her task.

The pretext of urgent business easily procured for her a private interview with the King, for the name of d'Estrées still acted like a spell upon the mind and heart of Henry, and the duchess was a consummate tactician. Notice was given to her of the day on which the sovereign would visit St. Denis; and as she presented herself in the lateral chapel where he had just concluded his devotions, Henry made a sign for his attendant nobles to withdraw, when the duchess found herself in a position to explain her errand, and to assure him that she had only been induced to make the present disclosure from her affection for his person, and the gratitude which she owed to him for the many benefits that she had experienced from his condescension. Having briefly dwelt on the contents of the letters which she delivered into his keeping, she did not even seek an excuse for the means by which they had come into her own possession, but concluded by observing: "I could not reconcile it to my conscience, Sire, to conceal so great an outrage; I should have felt like a criminal myself, had I been capable of suffering in silence such treason against the

greatest king, the best master, and the most gallant gentleman on earth."*

Henry was not proof against this compliment. He believed himself to be all that the duchess had asserted, but he liked to hear his own opinion confirmed by the lips of others; and, although smarting under the mortification of wounded vanity occasioned by the contents of the letters of his perfidious mistress, he smiled complacently upon Madame de Villars, thanking her for her zeal and attachment to his person, and assuring her that both were fully appreciated.

She had no sooner retired than, as the Queen had previously done, he repeatedly read over each letter in turn until his patience gave way under the task; when hastily summoning the Duke de Lude, he desired him to forthwith proceed to the apartments of the marquise, and to inform her in his name that "she was a perfidious woman, a monster, and the most wicked of her sex; and that he was resolved never to see her again."†

At this period Madame de Verneuil had quitted the palace, and was residing in an hôtel in the city, which had been presented to her by the King: a fortunate circumstance for the envoy, who required time and consideration to enable him to execute his onerous mission in a manner that might not tend to his own subsequent discomfiture; but on the delivery of the royal message,

* Amours du Grand Alcandre, pp. 272, 273.

† Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, p. 85. Saint-Edme, p. 218.

which even the courtly de Lude could not divest of its offensive character, Madame de Verneuil (who was well aware that the King, however he might yield to his momentary anger, was even less able to dispense with her society than she herself was to lose the favour which alone preserved her from the ignominy her conduct had justly merited), did not for an instant lose her self-possession. "Tell his Majesty," she replied, as calmly as though a sense of innocence had given her strength; "that being perfectly assured that I have never been guilty of word or deed which could justly incur his anger, I cannot imagine what can have induced him to treat me with so little consideration. That some one has traduced me, I cannot doubt; but I shall be revenged by a discovery of the truth."*

She then rose from her seat, and retired to her private-room, much more alarmed and agitated than she was willing to betray. De Lude had, during the interview, suffered a few remarks to escape him from which she was enabled to guess whence the blow had come; and conscious of the enormity of her imprudence, she lost no time in confiding to her most confidential friends the difficulty of her position, and entreating them to discover some method by which she might escape its consequences.

As had been previously arranged between them, Madame de Villars, at her audience of the King, had carefully abstained from betraying the share which the

* Amours du Grand Alcandre, p. 274.

Queen had taken in the intrigue, and had assumed to herself the very equivocal honour of the whole proceeding; and it was, consequently, against the duchess alone that the anger of the favourite was excited. Even the Prince de Joinville was forgiven, when with protestations of repentance, he threw himself at the feet of the marquise, and implored her pardon;—he could scarcely fail to be understood by such a woman, when he pleaded the extremes to which passion and disappointment could urge an ardent nature—while the Duke de Bellegarde was no sooner informed by the Princess de Conti that the fortune, and perhaps even the life, of her brother were involved in the affair, than he devoted himself to her cause.

We have already stated that the time was not one of unnecessary scruple, and the peril of the marquise was imminent. The letters not only existed, but were in the hands of the King: no honest or simple remedy could be suggested for such a disaster; and thus, as it was imperative to clear Madame de Verneuil from blame in order to save the Prince, it was ultimately determined to deny the authenticity of the documents, and to attribute the forgery to a secretary of the Duke de Guise, who was celebrated for his aptitude in imitating every species of handwriting. The attempt was hazardous; but the infatuation of Henry for the fascinating favourite was so well known, that the conspirators were assured of the eagerness with which he would welcome any explanation, however doubtful; and they, accordingly, instructed the

marquise boldly to disavow the authorship of the obnoxious packet. The advice was, unfortunately, somewhat tardy; as, in her first terror, Madame de Verneuil had declared her inability to deny that she had written the letters which had aroused the anger of the King; but she modified the admission, by declaring that her hand had betrayed her heart, and she had never felt what, in a moment of pique and annoyance, she had permitted herself to express. These were, however, mere words; and she had no sooner become cognizant of the expedients suggested by her advisers, than she resolved to gainsay them; and, accordingly, without a moment's hesitation, she dispatched a message to the monarch to entreat that he would allow her to justify herself.

For a few days, Henry remained inexorable, but at length his passion triumphed over his pride; and, instead of summoning the marquise to his presence as a criminal, he proceeded to her residence; listened blindly to her explanations; became, or feigned to become, convinced by her arguments; and, ultimately, confessing himself to have been sufficiently credulous to be the culprit rather than the judge, he made a peace with his exulting mistress which was cemented by a donation of six thousand livres.

As is usual in such cases, all the blame was now visited upon her accusers. Madame de Villars was exiled from the court—a sentence to her almost as terrible as that of death, wedded as she was to a court-

life, and by this unexpected result, separated from the Prince de Joinville, whose pardon she had hoped to secure by her apparent zeal for the honour of the monarch. The Prince himself was directed to proceed forthwith to Hungary to serve against the Turks; and the unfortunate secretary, who had been an unconscious instrument in the hands of the able conspirators, and whom it was necessary to consider guilty of a crime perfectly profitless to himself whatever might be its result, was committed to a prison; there to moralise at his leisure upon the vices of the great.

No mortification could, however, equal that of the Queen; who, having felt assured of the ruin of her rival, had incautiously betrayed her exultation in a manner better suited to a jealous wife than to an indignant sovereign; and who, when she became apprised of the reconciliation of the King with his wily mistress, expressed herself with so much warmth upon his wilful blindness, that a fortnight elapsed before they met again.

Nothing could be more ill-judged upon the part of Marie than this violence, as by estranging the King from herself she gave ample opportunity to the marquise to resume her empire over his mind. It nevertheless appears certain that although he resented the sarcasms of the Queen, he was less the dupe of Madame de Verneuil than those about him imagined; he was fascinated, but not convinced; and it is probable that had Marie de Medicis at this moment sufficiently

controled her feelings to remain neuter, she might, for a time at least, have retained her truant husband within the spell of her own attractions. Such, however, was not the case; and between his suspicion of being deceived by his mistress, and his irritation at being openly taunted by his wife, the King, who shrank with morbid terror from domestic discomfort, instead of finding repose in the privacy of his own hearth, even while he was anxious to shake off the trammels by which he had been so long fettered, and to abandon a *liaison* which had ceased to inspire him with confidence, only sought to escape by transferring his somewhat exhausted affections to a new object. The struggle was, however, a formidable one; for although the marquise had forfeited his good opinion, she had not lost her powers of fascination; and she so well knew how to use them, that, despite his better reason, the sensual monarch still remained her slave.

Thus his life became at this period one of perpetual worry and annoyance. Marie, irritated by what she justly considered as a culpable weakness and want of dignity on the part of her royal consort, persisted in exhibiting her resentment, and in loading the favourite with every mark of contempt and obloquy; while Madame de Verneuil, in her turn, renewed her assertions of the illegality of the Queen's marriage, and the consequent illegitimacy of the Dauphin. The effect of such a feud may be readily imagined: the court soon became divided into two distinct factions; and those among the

great ladies and nobles who frequented the circle of the marquise were forbidden the entrance of the Queen's apartments. One intrigue succeeded another; and while Marie, with jealous vengeance, endeavoured to mar the fortunes of those who attached themselves to the party of Madame de Verneuil, the marquise left no effort untried to injure the partisans of the Queen. This last rupture was an irrevocable one.*

In vain did Sully endeavour to restore peace. He could control the finances, and regulate the defences of a great nation; but he was as powerless as the King himself when he sought to fuse such jarring elements as these in the social crucible; and while he was still striving against hope to weaken, even if he could not wholly destroy, an animosity which endangered the dignity of the crown, and the respect due to one of the most powerful monarchs of Christendom, that monarch himself, wearied of a strife which he had not the moral courage either to terminate or to sustain, sought consolation for his trial in the smiles of Mademoiselle de Sourdis,† whose favour he purchased by giving her in marriage to

* Amours du Grand Alcandre, p. 276.

† Mademoiselle de Sourdis was the daughter of François d'Escoubleau, Seigneur de Jouy, de Launay, Marquis de Sourdis, &c., and of Isabelle Babou, dame d'Alluie, daughter of Jean Babou, Seigneur de la Bourdaisière, aunt of Gabrielle d'Estrées. He was deprived of the government of Chartres by the League; but was restored by Henry III., at the entreaty of Gabrielle.

the Count d'Estanges. This caprice, engendered rather by *ennui* than affection, was, however, soon terminated, as the new favourite could not, either personally or mentally, sustain a comparison with Madame de Verneuil; and great coldness still existed between the royal couple when the court removed to Blois.

During the sojourn of their Majesties in that city, a misunderstanding infinitely more serious than any by which it had been preceded took place between them; and at length became so threatening, that although the night was far advanced, the King dispatched d'Armagnac, his first valet-de-chambre, to desire the immediate presence of M. de Sully at the castle. Singularly enough, the duke in his Memoirs affects a most morbid reluctance even to allude to this outbreak, and professes his determination, in accordance with his promise to that effect made to both parties, not to reveal the subject of dispute; while at the same time he admits that, after a long interview with Henry, he spent the remainder of the night in passing from one chamber to the other, endeavouring to restore harmony between the royal pair; during which attempt many of the attendants of the court were enabled at intervals to hear all parties mention the names of the Duke and Duchess of Florence, the Duchess of Mantua, Virgilio Ursino, Don Juan de Medicis, the Duke de Bellegarde, Joanini, Concini, Leonora, Gondy, Caterinà Selvaggio,* Gondy, and more frequently still, of Madame

* Caterinà Selvaggio was one of the Queen's favourite Italian waiting-women.

de Verneuil ;* a circumstance which was quite sufficient to dispel all mystery, as it at once became evident to those who mentally combined these significant names, that the royal quarrel was a recriminatory one; and that while the Queen was indulging in invectives against the marquise, and her champion M. le Grand, the King retorted by reproaching her with the insolence of her Italian favourites, and her own weak submission to their thrall.†

Capefigue, in his history, has shown less desire than Sully to envelop this royal quarrel in mystery; and plainly asserts, although without quoting his authority for such a declaration, that after mutual reproaches had passed between Henry and his wife, the Queen became so enraged that she sprang out of bed, and throwing herself upon the monarch, severely scratched him in the face; a violence which he immediately repaid with interest, and which induced him to summon the minister to the palace, whose first care was to prevail upon the King to retire to another apartment.‡

Marie, exasperated by the persevering infidelity of her husband, considered herself, with some reason, as the aggrieved party; she had given a Dauphin to France; her fair fame was untainted; and she persisted in en-

* Sully, Mém., vol. iv, pp. 93, 94.

† Rambure, MS. Mém., vol. i, p. 332.

‡ Capefigue, Hist. de la Réforme, de la Ligue, et du Règne de Henri IV, vol. viii, pp. 147, 148.

forcing her right to retain and protect her Tuscan attendants. Henry, on his part, was equally unyielding; and it was, as we have already shown, several hours before the bewildered minister of finance could succeed in restoring even a semblance of peace. To every argument which he advanced the Queen replied by enumerating the libertine adventures of her husband, (with the whole of which she proved herself to be unhappily only too familiar,) and by declaring that she would one day take ample vengeance on his mistresses; strong in the conviction that to whatever acts of violence she might be induced by the insults heaped upon her, no rightly thinking person would be found to condemn so just a revenge.*

This declaration, let Sully modify it as he might, could but aggravate the anger of the King; and, accordingly, he replied by a threat of banishing his wife to one of his distant palaces, and even of sending her back to Florence, with the whole of her foreign attendants.

From this project, if he really ever seriously entertained it, Henry was, however, at once dissuaded by his minister; who, less blinded by passion than himself, instantly recognised its enormity when proportioned to the offence which it was intended to punish; and consequently he did not hesitate to represent the odium which so unjust a measure must call down upon the head

* Histoire de la Mère et du Fils, a continuation of the "Memoirs of Richelieu," incorrectly attributed to Mezeray, vol. i, p. 7.

of the King.* The Queen, whose irritation had reached its climax, was less easily persuaded; or the astute Concini, who was ever daring where his personal fortunes might be benefitted, sacrificed his royal mistress to his own interests; for we find it recorded that some time subsequently, when Madame de Verneuil was residing at her hôtel in Paris, the Florentine favourite privately informed the monarch that Marie had engaged some persons on whom she could rely, to insult the marquise; upon which Henry, after expressing his thanks for the communication, caused the favourite to leave the city under a strong escort.†

Had the King been less unscrupulously inconstant, there is, however, no doubt that Marie de Medicis, from the strict propriety of her conduct to the last, and under every provocation, would ultimately have become an attached and devoted wife. Her ambition was satisfied, and her heart interested in her maternal duties; but the open and unblushing licentiousness with which Henry pursued his numerous and frequently ignoble intrigues, irritated her naturally excitable temper; and consequently, tended to throw her more completely into the power of the ambitious Italians by whom she was surrounded; among whom the most influential was Madame de Concini, a woman of firm mind, engaging manners, and strong national prejudices; who, in following the fortunes of her illustrious foster-sister, had

* Sully, Note to Memoirs, vol. iv, pp. 95, 96.

† Richelieu, La Mère et la Fils, vol. i, p. 7.

deceived herself into the belief that they would be almost without a cloud; and it is therefore probable that a disappointment in this expectation, which, moreover, involved her own personal interests, rendered her bitter in her judgment of the *débonnaire* and reckless monarch who showed himself so indifferent to the attractions of her idolised mistress.

The subsequent ingratitude of Marie, indeed, only tends to increase the admiration of a dispassionate critic for the ill-requited Leonora; to whom, it would appear, after a close analysis of her character, that ample justice has never yet been done; for ambitious as she was, it is certain that this unfortunate woman ever sought the welfare of the Queen, to whom she owed her advancement in life, even when the more short-sighted selfishness of her husband would have induced him to sacrifice all other considerations to his own insatiable thirst for power.

Unfortunately, however, the very excess of her affection rendered her a dangerous adviser to the indignant and neglected Princess, from whose private circle Henry at this period almost wholly absented himself.

Nor were these domestic anxieties the only ones against which the French king had to contend at this particular crisis; for while the court circle had been absorbed in feasting and festivity, the seeds of civil war, sown by a few of the still discontented nobles, began to germinate; and Henry constantly received intelligence of seditious movements in the provinces. On the

shores of the Loire and the Garonne the symptoms of disaffection had already ceased to be problematical; while at Rochelle and Limoges the inhabitants had assaulted the government officers who sought to levy an obnoxious tax.

Little doubt existed in the minds of the monarch and his ministers, that these hostile demonstrations were encouraged, if not suggested, by the secret agents of Philip III. of Spain, and the Duke of Savoy, who had been busily engaged some time previously in dissuading the Swiss and Grisons from renewing the alliance which they had formed with Henry III., and which became void at his death. This attempt was, however, frustrated by an offer made to them by Sillery of a million in gold, as payment of the debts still due to them from the French government for their past services; which enormous sum reached them through the hands of the Duke de Biron, to whom, as well as to the memory of his father, the old marshal, many of the Switzers were strongly and personally attached.

Day by day, also, the King had still more serious cause of apprehension, having ascertained almost beyond a doubt that the Duke de Bouillon, the head of the Huguenot party, who were incensed against Henry for having deserted their faith, was secretly engaged in a treaty with Spain, Savoy, and England; a circumstance rendered doubly dangerous from the fact that the Protestants still held several fortified places in Guienne, Languedoc, and other provinces, which would necessarily, should the

negociation prove successful, be delivered into his hands. There can be no doubt, moreover, that the monarch keenly felt the ingratitude of this noble, whom he had himself raised to the independent sovereignty of the duchy whence he derived his title; but his mortification was increased upon ascertaining that the Maréchal de Biron, who had been one of his most familiar friends, and in whose good-faith and loyalty he had ever placed implicit trust, was also numbered among his enemies, and endeavouring to secure his own personal advancement by betraying his master.

No two men could probably have been selected throughout the whole nation more fitted to endanger the stability of the royal authority. Both were marshals of France, and alike celebrated for their talent as military leaders, as well as for their insatiable ambition. Of the two, perhaps, however, the Duke de Bouillon was likely to prove the most formidable enemy to the sovereign; from the fact of his being by far the more able and the more subtle politician; and, moreover, gifted with a caution and judgment which were entirely wanting in the impetuous and reckless Biron.

Bouillon, who possessed great influence in the counsels of the Huguenots, was supported by the Duke de la Tremouille,* his co-religionist, another leader of the re-

* Claude, Seigneur de la Tremouille, second Duke de Thouars, peer of France, Prince de Talmond, was born in the year 1566, and first bore arms under François de Bourbon, Duke de Montpensier. He embraced the reformed religion, and attached himself to the

formed party; and secretly also by the Duke d'Epernon,* whose fortunes having greatly deteriorated since the death of Henry III., considered himself harshly treated,

fortunes of Henry of Navarre, subsequently King of France, whom he followed to the sieges of Rouen and Poitiers, and the battle of Fontaine-Française; after which the King conferred upon him the rank of peer of France. He was the brother-in-law of the Duke de Bouillon. He died in the castle of Thouars, to which he had retired, suspected of treason, after refusing to return to court to justify himself, on the 25th of October, 1604, in his thirty-eighth year.

* Jean Louis de Nogaret de la Valette, Duke d'Epernon, was the younger son of an old Gascon family, who sought his fortunes at the French court under the name of Caumont. After the death of Charles IX., he offered his services to Henry of Navarre, subsequently Henry IV.; but was ultimately admitted to the intimacy of Henry III., who caused him to be instructed in politics and literature, and made him one of his *mignons*. He was next created Duke d'Epernon, first peer, and admiral of France, colonel-general of infantry, and held several governments. On the death of Henry III., this ennobled adventurer once more became a partisan of his successor, and commanded the royal forces during the war in Savoy; but throughout the whole of this reign he lived in constant misunderstanding with the court and the King, and was even suspected of the act of regicide which deprived France of her idolised monarch. It was the Duke d'Epernon who, immediately after that event, convoked the Parliament, caused the recognition of Marie de Medicis as Regent, and formed a privy council over which he presided. Banished by the Concini during their period of power, he reappeared at court after their fall; but Richelieu would not permit him to hold any government office, and, moreover, deprived him of all his governments save that of Guienne. He died in 1642.

and was ready to join every cabal which was formed against his successor, although he always avoided any open demonstration of hostility which might tend to compromise his personal safety.

A third individual pointed out to the King as one of his most active enemies was Charles de Valois, Count d'Auvergne, the step-brother of Madame de Verneuil; to whom, not only in consideration of his royal blood, but also as the relative of the marquise, Henry had ever shown a favour which he little merited. Such an adversary the monarch could, however, afford to despise, for he well knew the count to be more dangerous as a friend than as an enemy; his cowardly dread of danger constantly impelling him to betray others in order to save himself at the merest prospect of peril; while his cunning, his gratuitous and unmanly cruelty, and the unblushing perfidy which recalled only with too much vividness the character of his father, Charles IX., rendered him at once unsafe and unpleasant as an associate. Despite all these drawbacks, Biron with his usual recklessness had nevertheless accepted him as a partner in his meditated revolt, d'Auvergne having declared that he would run all risks in order to revenge the dishonour brought upon his family by the King; but in reality only seeking to benefit himself in a struggle where he had little to lose, and might, as he believed, become a gainer.

The madness of the Duke de Biron in betraying the interests of a sovereign who had constantly treated him

with honour and distinction, can only find its solution in his over-weaning vanity, as he was already wealthy, powerful and popular; and had, moreover, acquired the reputation of being one of the first soldiers in France. He had been appointed admiral, and subsequently marshal; and had even been intrusted with the command of the King's armies at the siege of Amiens, where he bore the title of marshal-general, although several princes of the blood, and the connétable himself were present. He was decorated with all the Royal Orders; was a duke and peer of the realm, and Governor of Bordeaux; and, in fine, every attainable dignity had been lavished upon him; while he yielded precedence only to royalty, and to the Duke de Montmorency, to whose office it was vain to aspire during his lifetime.*

Such was the Maréchal de Biron, when, in the vainglorious hope of one day becoming the sovereign of certain of the French provinces, he voluntarily trampled under foot every obligation of loyalty and gratitude, and leagued himself with the enemies of his royal master, to wrest from him the sceptre which he so firmly wielded. The first intelligence of the duke's defection which reached the monarch—to whom, however his conduct had long appeared problematical—he obtained through the treachery of the maréchal's most trusted agent; a man whom Biron had constantly employed in

* Daniel, vol. vii, p. 408.

all his intrigues, and from whom he had no secrets. This individual, who, from certain circumstances, saw reason to believe that the plans of the duke must ultimately fail from their very immensity, and who feared for his own safety in the event of his patron's disgrace, resolved to save himself by communicating the whole conspiracy to the King; for which purpose he solicited an audience, declaring that he had important matters to reveal, which involved not only the throne of the sovereign, but even his life; and he so confidently insisted upon this fact, that an interview was at length accorded to him at Fontainebleau; where in the presence of Henry and the Duke de Sully, he confessed that conceiving himself to have been ill-used by the court, he had from mortified vanity adopted the interests of M. de Biron, and even participated in the conspiracy of which he was now anxious to anticipate the effects; and from which he had instantly retired when he discovered that it involved the lives of his Majesty and the Dauphin.

He then solemnly asserted that when the maréchal de Biron proceeded to Flanders to receive the oath of peace from the Archduke Albert, the Spaniards, who at once detected the extent of his vanity and ambition, had flattered his weakness, and encouraged his hopes; and that they had ultimately dispatched to him an individual named Picoté, who for some crime had been exiled from Orleans, and who was authorized to give him the assurance that it only depended upon the

duke himself to secure a brilliant position through their agency should he see fit to become their ally. The maréchal, his associate went on to say, listened greedily to the proposition; and expressed his willingness to treat with Spain whenever it might be deemed expedient to confide to him the real meaning of the message; a reply which satisfied the Spaniards that with proper caution, they should find it no difficult undertaking to attach him entirely to their interests; or, failing in this attempt, to rid themselves of a dangerous adversary by rendering him the victim of his own treason.

Elated by the brilliant prospect which thus opened upon him, Biron gradually became less energetic in the service of his legitimate master; and after the peace of Vervin, finding his influence necessarily diminished, he began to murmur, affecting to believe that the services which he had rendered to the sovereign had not been duly recognised; and it was at this period, according to his betrayer, that their acquaintance had commenced, which so rapidly ripened into friendship that ere long he became the depository of his patron's most cherished secrets.

After many and anxious consultations, principally caused by the uncertainty of the duke as to the nature of the honours which were to be conferred upon him, it had been at length resolved between the two conspirators that they should dispatch a priest to the Duke of Savoy, a monk of Citeaux to Milan, and Picoté himself to Spain,

to treat with the several princes in the name of the maréchal; and what was even more essential to the monarch to ascertain, was the fact that a short time subsequently, and before he visited Paris, the Duke of Savoy had entered into a secret negotiation with Biron, and even led him to believe that he would bestow upon him the hand of one of his daughters; by which marriage the maréchal would have become the cousin of the Emperor of Germany, and the nephew of the King of Spain; an alliance which, to so ambitious a spirit, opened up an opportunity of self-aggrandizement never to be realized in his own country, and under his own sovereign.

In return for this concession, Biron had pledged himself to his wily ally that he would provide so much occupation for Henry in the interior of his kingdom, that he should have no leisure to attempt the invasion of the marquisate of Saluzzo; a pledge which more than any other gratified M. de Savoie, who lived in constant dread of being driven from his territories. During the war, the maréchal nevertheless took several of the duke's fortresses in Brescia; but a perfect understanding had been established between them which rendered this circumstance comparatively unimportant; and on the refusal of Henry to permit the appointment of a governor of his own selection at the citadel of Bourg, Biron became so incensed by what he designated as the ingratitude of his sovereign—though he was fully aware that by countenancing such an arrangement, the King must necessarily leave

the fortress entirely in his power—that he no longer restrained himself, but declared that the death of the French sovereign was essential to the accomplishment of his projects; and meanwhile he gave the Duke of Savoy, whom he thenceforward regarded as his firmest friend, constant information of the state and movements of the hostile army.

A short time afterwards, it was definitely arranged between the conspirators that the Duke of Savoy should give his third daughter in marriage to the maréchal, with a dowry of five hundred thousand golden crowns, while the Spanish monarch should cede to him all his claims of sovereignty upon the duchy of Burgundy; and that the Count de Fuentes* and the Duke of Savoy should march their combined forces into France, thus disabling Henry from pursuing his design of reconquering the long-coveted duchy.

This treasonable design, owing to circumstances upon which the impetuous Biron had failed to calculate, proved, however, abortive; and he had no sooner convinced himself of the fact, and comprehended the perilous position in which he had been placed by his imprudence, than he hastened to Lyons where the King was then sojourning; and having obtained an audience, he confessed with a seeming frankness irresistible to so generous and unsuspicious a nature as that of Henry, that he had been sufficiently misled by his ambition secretly to demand from the Duke of Savoy the hand of his

* Pietro Henriques Azevedo, Count de Fuentes.

younger daughter; and that, moreover, in the excess of his mortification at the refusal of his Majesty to appoint a governor of his own selection at Bourg, he had even been induced to plot against the state; for both which crimes he humbly solicited the royal pardon.

Full well did Henry and his minister remember this occurrence; nor could the King forget that although he had urged the maréchal to reveal to him the whole extent of the intrigue, he had dextrously evaded his most searching inquiries, and constantly recurred to his contrition. Henry owed much to Biron, whom he had long loved; and with a magnanimity worthy of his noble nature, after a few expostulations and reproaches, he not only pardoned him for what he believed to have been a mere temporary abandonment of his duties, but even assured him of his future favour, and bade him return in all surety to his post.

Unhappily, however, the demon of ambition by which the duke was possessed proved too powerful for the generous clemency of the King; and he resumed his treasonable practices; but a misunderstanding having ensued between himself and the false friend by whom he was now betrayed, all the private documents which had been exchanged by himself and the foreign princes through whose aid he trusted to obtain the honours of sovereignty, were communicated on this occasion to the monarch whose dignity and whose confidence he had alike outraged.

A free pardon was accorded to the traitor through

whose means Henry was made acquainted with the extent of the intrigue, on condition that he should reside within the precints of the court, and lend his assistance to convict the duke of his crime, terms to which the perfidious confidant readily consented; while with a tact worthy of his falsehood, he soon succeeded in reinstating himself in the good graces of the duke, by professing to be earnestly engaged in France in furthering his interests, and by giving him reason to believe that he was still devoted to his cause.

To this deception, and to his own obstinacy, Biron owed his fate.*

The threatening facts which had thus been revealed to them, were communicated by Henry and his minister to certain members of the privy council, by whom a report was drawn up, and placed in the hands of the Chancellor; and, this preliminary arrangement completed, it was determined to recal the maréchal to court either to justify himself, or to undergo the penalty of his treason. In order to effect this object, however, it was necessary to exercise the greatest caution, as Biron was then in Burgundy; and his alarm having already been excited by the evasion of his most confidential agent, they felt that he might, should his suspicions be increased, place himself at the head of the troops under his command, by whom he was idolized, and thus become doubly dangerous. It was, consequently, only by a subterfuge that there was any prospect of inducing him to approach the capital;

* Montfaucon, vol. v, pp. 405—407.

and the King, by the advice of Sully, and not without a latent hope that he might be enabled to clear himself of blame, openly asserted that he put no faith in the disclosures which had been made to him, and that he would advise the maréchal to be careful of those about him, whose envy or enmity led them to put a misconstruction upon his motives as well as upon his actions. The Baron de Luz,* the confidential friend of Biron, for whose ear these declarations were especially designed, did not fail to communicate them on the instant to the accused party; while La Fin,† by whom he had been

* Edme de Malain, Baron de Luz, Lieutenant-Governor of Burgundy, was the son of Joachim de Malain and Marguerite d'Epinac. He was deeply involved in the conspiracy of the Maréchal de Biron, and would infallibly have perished with him, had he not been induced by the President Jeannin to reveal all that he knew of the plot to Henry IV., on condition of a free pardon. He survived his treachery for ten years, and in 1613 was killed in a duel by the Chevalier de Guise. His son, Claude de Malain, having sworn to avenge his death, in his turn challenged M. de Guise, at whose hands he met with the same fate as his father.

† Jacques de Lanode, Sieur de la Fin, was a petty Burgundian nobleman, whose spirit of intrigue was perpetually involving those to whom he attached himself in cabals and factions. He had been actively engaged at one time in the affairs of the Duke d'Alençon; and at another he was no less busily engaged in instigating Henry III. to aggressive measures against the Duke de Guise. Since that period he had negociated with the ministers of Spain and Savoy; and by these means he had contracted a great intimacy with the Duke de Biron, to whom he affected to be distantly related, and over whom he acquired such extraordinary

betrayed, likewise wrote to assure him that in revealing the conspiracy to the King and the ministers he had been cautious not to utter a word by which he could be personally implicated. It is certain, however, that the duke placed little reliance either upon the assertions of Henry, or the assurances of his treacherous ally; as on the receipt of a letter from the sovereign, announcing his own instant departure for Poitou, where he invited Biron to join him, in order that he might afford him his advice upon certain affairs of moment, the latter wrote to excuse himself; alleging, as a pretext for his disobedience to the royal command, the rumour of a reported aggression of the Spaniards, and the necessity of his presence at a meeting of the states of Burgundy which had been convoked for the 22nd of May, where it would be essential that he should watch over the interests of his Majesty.*

The King did not further insist at that moment; but having ascertained on his return from Poitou that fresh movements had been made in Burgundy, in Saintonge, in Perigord, and in Guienne, which threatened to prove inimical to his authority, and that couriers were con-

ascendancy by his subtle and unceasing flattery, that the weak marshal became a mere puppet in his hands; and misled by his vanity, suffered himself to be persuaded that his merit had been overlooked, and his services comparatively unrewarded; and that he was consequently fully authorised in aspiring even to regal honours, and in using every exertion to attain them.

* Matthieu, Histoire des Derniers Troubles arrivez en France, Book II, p. 411.

stantly passing from one of these provinces to the other; he sent to desire the presence of the Sieur Descures,* an intimate friend and follower of the maréchal, whom he commanded to proceed with all speed to Burgundy, and to inform his lord that if he did not forthwith obey the royal summons, the sovereign would go in person to bring him thence. This threat was sufficiently appalling; and the rather as Sully, by his authority as grand-master of artillery, had taken the precaution on pretext of recasting the cannon, and improving the quality of the powder in the principal cities of Burgundy, to cripple Biron's resources, and to render it impossible for him to attempt any rational resistance to the royal will. The maréchal soon perceived that he had been duped, but, nevertheless, he would not yield; and Descures left him, firm in his determination not to trust himself within the precincts of the court.

The King, who, from his old attachment to Biron, had hitherto hoped that he had been calumniated, and that, in lieu of crimes, he had only been guilty of follies, offended by so resolute an opposition to his will, began, like his ministers, to apprehend that he must in truth thenceforward number the duke among his enemies; and he consequently suffered himself, shortly after the return of his last messenger, to be persuaded to dispatch the President Jeannin† as the bearer of a third summons to

* Pierre Fougeuse, Sieur Descures.

† Pierre Jeannin was the architect of his own fortunes. He was born at Autun, in 1540, where his father followed the trade

the maréchal, and to represent to him how greatly he was increasing the displeasure of the sovereign by his

of a tanner, and was universally respected, alike for his probity and his sound judgment. The future president, after receiving the rudiments of his education in his native town, was removed to Bourges, where he became a pupil of the celebrated Cujas. In 1569, he was entered as an advocate at the Parliament of Burgundy, where he greatly distinguished himself during the space of two years, at the expiration of which time he was appointed provincial advocate, and member of the Burgundian states; and in this capacity he justified, by his extraordinary talents, the choice of his fellow-citizens. On one occasion a wealthy individual, enchanted by his eloquence, waited upon him at his house, and expressed a desire to have him for a son-in-law; inquiring, however, at the same time, the amount of his property. Jeannin, by no means disconcerted at the abruptness of his visitor, pointed with a smile first to his head and then to his books: "You see it before you;" he said with honest pride; "I have not, nor do I require, a greater fortune." Tradition is silent as regards the termination of the interview. In the following year (1576), Jeannin was present at the council which was held during the frightful massacre of St. Bartholomew, where he secured the friendship of the Count de Charny, at that period grand equerry of France, lieutenant-general of Burgundy, and provisional governor of the province during the absence of the Duke d'Aumale, then Governor of Paris; and in the same year he was deputed from the *tiers-état* of Burgundy to the States-General, convoked at Blois by Henry III. It was on that occasion that he began to comprehend the designs of the Guises, and made the celebrated speech in favour of religious toleration, which does so much honour to his memory. By Henry III. he was successively appointed governor of the chancelry of Burgundy, counsellor of the provincial Parliament, and subsequently president.—*Petitot*.

disobedience, as well as strengthening the suspicions which were already entertained against him. Finally, the president was instructed to assure the haughty and imperious rebel that the King had not forgotten the good service which he had rendered to the nation; and that he ascribed the accusations which had reached him rather to the exaggerations of those who in making such reports sought to increase their own favour at court, than to any breach of trust in the maréchal himself.*

Somewhat reassured by these declarations, and unconscious of the extent of La Fin's treachery, Biron allowed himself to be persuaded by the eloquence of Jeannin, and reluctantly left Dijon for Fontainebleau, where he arrived on the 13th of June. As he was about to dismount, La Fin approached to welcome him; and while holding his stirrup whispered in his ear: "Courage, my master; speak out boldly, for they know nothing." The duke silently nodded his reply, and at once proceeded to the royal chamber, where Henry received him with a gay countenance and open arms; declaring that he had done well to accept his invitation, or he should assuredly have gone to fetch him in person as he had threatened. Biron excused himself, but with a coldness extremely displeasing to the King, who, however, forebore to exhibit any symptom of annoyance;

* Daniel, vol. vii, pp. 414, 415. Péréfixe, vol. ii, p. 367 Matthieu, Hist. des Derniers Troubles, Book. II, p. 411.

and after a short conversation in which no further allusion was made to the position of the maréchal, Henry, as he had often previously done, proposed to show him the progress of the new buildings upon which he was then actively engaged; and, leading the way to the gardens, he did in fact for a time point out to him every object of interest. This done, he suddenly turned the discourse upon the numerous reasons for displeasure which the recent acts of Biron had given him (being careful, nevertheless, not to betray the extent of his knowledge); and earnestly urged him to confess the real amount of the imprudence of which he had been guilty; pledging his royal word, that should he do so with frankness and sincerity, the avowal would ensure his pardon.

But this the infatuated duke had no intention of conceding. The whispered assurance of La Fin still vibrated on his ear; and he also calculated largely on his intimacy with d'Auvergne, which secured to him the influence of Madame de Verneuil. He consequently replied with an arrogance as unbecoming as it was misplaced, that he had not come to court to justify himself, but in order to ascertain who were his accusers; and moreover added that having committed no crime, he did not require any pardon; nor could either Henry himself, or the Duke de Sully, with whom he had subsequently a lengthened interview, succeed in inducing him to make the slightest confession.

The mid-day repast was no sooner over than the

King sent to summon the maréchal to his closet, where he once more exerted every effort to soften the obduracy of the man to whose valour he was well aware that he had been greatly indebted for his crown, and whom he was consequently anxious to save from dishonour and ignominy; but, unfortunately for his own interests, Biron retained as vivid a recollection of the fact as Henry himself; and he so highly estimated the value of his services, that he resolved to maintain the haughty position which he had assumed, and to persist in a denial that was fated to cost him his life. Instead, therefore, of throwing himself upon the clemency of the King by an undisguised avowal of his treason, he merely replied to the appeal by again demanding to know who were his accusers; upon which Henry rose from his seat, and exclaiming: "Come, we will play a match at tennis—" hastily left the room, followed by the culprit.

The King having selected the Count de Soissons* as his

* Charles de Bourbon-Conti, Count de Soissons, espoused the cause of the King of Navarre, whom he accompanied to the battle of Coutras, in 1587. Henry promised to him the hand of his sister, Catherine de Navarre, to whom he presented him immediately afterwards, when a reciprocal affection was the result. M. de Soissons, however, abandoned the reformed party, and did not return to it until after the death of Henry III. He served actively and zealously during the League; but having discovered that the King did not intend to fulfil his promise of marrying him to the Princess, he quitted him during the siege of Rouen, in 1592, on the pretext of illness, and hastened to Bearn, hoping to induce Catherine to become his wife before the King could inter-

second, against the Duke d'Epernon and the maréchal, this ill-assorted party continued for some time apparently absorbed in the game; and so thoroughly did it recal past scenes and times to the mind of the monarch, that he resolved, before he abandoned his once faithful subject to his fate, to make one last endeavour to overcome his obstinacy. He accordingly authorised M. de Soissons to exert whatever influence he possessed with the rash man who was so blindly working out his own ruin; and to represent to him the madness of persisting in a line of conduct which could not fail to irritate and anger his royal master.

"Remember, Monsieur;" said the Prince, who was as anxious as the monarch himself that the scandal of a public trial, and the certainty of an ignominious death, should be spared to so brave a soldier: "remember that a sovereign's anger is the messenger of destruction."*

Biron, however, persisted in declaring that he had no reason to fear the displeasure of Henry, and had consequently no confession to make; and with this fatal answer the count was fain to content himself.

fere to prevent their union; and by engaging himself to support his brother, the Cardinal de Bourbon, to make himself master of the possessions of the house of Navarre, beyond the Loire. On reaching Bearn, however, he found Henry already there, and was obliged to withdraw without having accomplished either object. A short time subsequently he renewed his friendship with that monarch, and officiated as Duke of Normandy at his coronation, at Chartres, in 1594.

* Pérefixe, vol. ii, p. 369.

The King rose early on the following morning full of anxiety and apprehension. He could not look back upon the many gallant acts of the unfortunate maréchal without feeling a bitter pang at the idea that an old, and formerly zealous servant was about to become a victim to expediency; for the spirit of revolt, which he had hitherto endeavoured to suppress by clemency, had now risen hydra-headed, threatening to dispute his right of reprisal, and to involve the nation once more in civil war. He painfully felt, that under circumstances like these, lenity would become, not only a weakness, but a crime; and possessing, as he did, the most indubitable proofs of Biron's guilt, he saw himself compelled to forget the friend in the sovereign, and to deliver up the attainted noble to the justice of his betrayed country.

A privy council was consequently assembled, at which Henry declared his determination to arrest the duke, and to put him upon his trial, if, after mature deliberation, it was decided that he deserved death; as otherwise he was resolved not to injure his reputation by any accusations which might tarnish his renown, or embitter his existence. To this last relenting he received in reply an assurance that no further deliberation was requisite, as the treason of the maréchal was so fully proved, and the facts so amply authenticated, that he would be condemned to the axe by every tribunal in the world.

On finding that his councillors were unanimous in

this opinion, the King summoned MM. de Vitry,* and de Praslin,† and gave them orders to arrest both the Duke de Biron and the Count d'Auvergne; desiring them at the same time to act with the greatest caution, and carefully to avoid all noise and disorder.

When their Majesties had supped, they retired to the private apartments; where, among other courtiers, they were joined by the two conspirators, both of whom were peculiarly obnoxious to the Queen—d'Auvergne from his general character, as well as his relationship to Madame de Verneuil; and Biron from his intimacy with the brother of the favourite, who had renewed her pretended claim to the hand of Henry; a subject which always tortured the heart of Marie, involving, as it did, the legitimacy of her son, and her own honour. It was not, therefore, without a great exertion of self-command that she replied to the ceremonious compliments of the duke by courtesies equally lip-deep; and,

* Louis de l'Hôpital de Vitry, chevalier of all the Royal Orders, and captain of the King's body-guard, was descended from the illustrious and ancient family of the Marquises de Sainte-Même and de Montpelier, Counts of Entremons.

† Charles de Choiseuil, Marquis de Praslin, the representative of one of the most illustrious families of France, was a descendant of the ancient counts of Langres. He distinguished himself at the siege of La Fère in 1580, at that of Paris in 1589, and at the battle of Aumale in 1592. Henry IV. made him a captain of his body-guard; and Louis XIII., in 1619, bestowed upon him the *bâton* of marshal of France. He died in 1626, in his sixty-third year.

at the express desire of the King, was induced to accept him as her companion at the card-table. During the progress of the game a Burgundian nobleman named Mergé approached the maréchal, and murmured in a low voice, as he affected to examine his cards, that he was about to be arrested; but Biron being at that moment deeply engaged by his occupation, did not hear or heed the warning; and he continued to play on in the greatest security until d'Auvergne, to whom Mergé had communicated the ill-success of his own attempt, in his turn drew near the royal table, and whispered as he bowed profoundly to the Queen, by which means he brought his lips to a level with the duke's ear: "We are not safe here."

Biron did not for an instant lose his presence of mind; but without the movement of a muscle again gathered up his cards, and pursued his game, which was only terminated at midnight by an intimation from the King that it was time for her Majesty to retire. Henry then withdrew in his turn; but before he left the room, he turned towards the maréchal, and said with marked emphasis: "Adieu, *Baron de Biron*, you know what I have told you."*

* Mezeray asserts, and with greater probability, that Henry's parting words were: "Since you will not speak out, adieu, Baron" (*Hist. de France*, vol. x, p. 201); while Pérefixe gives a third version, asserting that the King took leave of him by saying: "Well then, the truth must be learnt elsewhere; adieu, Baron de Biron."—*Hist. de Henri le Grand*, vol. ii, p. 371.

As the duke, considerably startled by this extraordinary address, was about to leave the ante-chamber, Vitry seized his right arm with one hand, and with the other laid a firm grasp upon his sword exclaiming: "Monsieur, the King has confided the care of your person to me. Deliver up your sword." A few of the gentlemen of the duke's household who were awaiting him made a show of resistance, but they were instantly seized by the guard; upon which the maréchal demanded an interview with the monarch.

"His Majesty has retired;" replied Vitry. "Give me your sword."

"Ha! my sword;" said Biron with a deep sigh of indignant mortification; "that sword which has rendered him so much good service;" and without further comment or expostulation he placed the weapon in the hands of the captain of the guard, and followed him to the chamber in which he was to pass the night.

The Count d'Auvergne had meanwhile also been arrested at the gate of the palace by M. de Praslin, and conducted to another apartment.

The criminals were no sooner secured than the King dispatched a messenger to Sully to inform him of the fact, and to desire his immediate attendance at the palace; and on his arrival, after narrating to him the mode of their capture, he desired him to mount his horse, and to repair without delay to the Bastille, in order to prepare apartments for them in the fortress. "I will forward them in boats to the water-gate of the

Arsenal," he pursued; "let them land there, but be careful that they are seen by no one; and convey them thence to their lodgings as quietly as possible across your own courts and gardens. So soon as you have arranged everything for their landing, hasten to the Parliament and to the Hôtel-de-Ville; there explain all that has passed, and say that on my arrival in the capital, I will communicate my reasons for what I have done, of which the justice will be at once apparent."*

This arrangement was made upon the instant, and on the morrow the prisoners were embarked in separate boats upon the Seine, under a strong escort of the King's body-guard; and on their arrival at the Bastille they were delivered into the express keeping of the Duke de Sully; while upon his subsequent entrance into Paris on the afternoon of the same day, Henry was received with acclamation by the citizens, who were aware of the fruitless efforts made by the monarch to induce the maréchal to return to his allegiance, and whose joy was of the most enthusiastic description at the escape of their beloved sovereign from a foul conspiracy.† The Maréchal de Biron, like all men who have attained to a high station, and whose ambition prompts them to conciliate the good-will of those by whom they are approached, possessed many friends; but

* Sully, Mém., vol. iv, pp. 108, 109.

† Daniel, vol. vii, pp. 415—417. Matthieu, Hist. des Derniers Troubles, Book II, pp. 413—415. Mezeray, vol. x, pp. 196—202 Péréfixe, vol. ii, pp. 369—372.

the accusation of *lèse-majesté* under which he laboured, was one of so formidable a nature that they remained totally passive; and it was only his near relatives who ventured to peril their own favour by making an appeal in his behalf. Their supplications, earnest and humble though they were, failed, however, to shake the resolution of Henry, whose pride had, in this instance, been doubly wounded alike as a monarch and as a man. He felt that not only had the King of France to deal with a rebel, but that the confiding friend, who had been ready upon the slightest appearance of regret or repentance, once more to forgive, had been treated with distrust, and recompensed by falsehood.

While those closely connected with him were endeavouring, by every means in their power, to appease the just indignation of the sovereign, and to intercede in his behalf, Biron himself, as though his past services must necessarily suffice to secure his impunity, was indulging, even within the formidable walls of the Bastille, in the grossest and most ill-judged vituperations against the King; and boasting of his own exploits, rather like a maniac than a brave and gallant soldier who had led armies into the field, and there done his duty gallantly.* He partook sparingly of the food which was presented to him; and instead of taking rest, spent the greater portion of the night in pacing to and fro the narrow apartment. It was evident that he had firm

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 203.

faith either in the royal pardon, or in the means of escape being provided for him by his friends; but as day by day went by, and that he received no intelligence from without, while he remarked that every individual who entered his chamber was fully armed, and that the knives upon his table were not pointed, in order that he should be unable to convert them into defensive weapons, he became somewhat less violent; and he no sooner ascertained that Henry had refused to comply with the petition of his family, than he said, with a bitter laugh: "Ha! I see that they wish me to take the road to the scaffold." Thenceforward he ceased to demand justice on his accusers, became less imperious, and even admitted that he had no rational hope save in the mercy of the monarch.*

On the 27th of July, the preliminary arrangements having been completed, the maréchal was conducted to the palace of justice by the Sieur de Montigny,† the Governor

* Matthieu, Hist. des Troubles, Book II, pp. 415, 416.

† François de la Grange d'Anquien, Seigneur de Montigny, Sery, &c., afterwards known as the Maréchal de Montigny, served with the Catholics at Coutras, where he was taken prisoner. In 1601, Henry IV. made him Governor of Paris; in 1609, lieutenant of the King in the three bishoprics; and subsequently, in 1616, Marie de Medicis procured for him the *bâton* of marshal of France. He commanded the royal army against the malcontents in Nivernais, and died in the same year (1617). He had but one son, who left no male issue; but his brother had, among other children, Henri, Marquis d'Anquien, whose daughter, Marie Casimire, married Sobieski, King of Poland, and died in France, in 1716, two years after her return to her native country.

of Paris, in a covered barge escorted by twelve or fifteen armed men. Previously, however, to his being put upon his trial, he was privately interrogated by the commissioners chosen for that purpose; but this last judicial effort to save him only tended to secure his ruin. When confronted with his judges, Biron appeared to have lost all consistency of character; the soldier was sunk in the sophist; he argued vaguely and inconsistently; and compromised his own cause by the very clumsiness of the efforts which he made to clear himself. Unaware of the revelations of La Fin, when he was confronted with him he declared him to be a man of honour, his relative, and his very good friend; but the depositions of the Burgundian noble were no sooner made known to him than he retracted his former assertion, branding him as a sorcerer, a traitor, an assassin, ond the vilest of men, with other epithets too coarse for repetition.* These terrible accusations, however, came too late to serve his cause; he had already committed himself by his previous panegyric; and, perceiving that such was the case, he hastened to support his testimony against his former accomplice by asserting that were Renazé alive and in France, he should be able to prove the truth of what he advanced, and to justify himself. Unfortunately, for the success of this assurance, Renazé in his turn made his appearance in court; having, by a strange chance, recently escaped from Savoy where the

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 204.

duke had held him a prisoner; and Biron had the mortification of finding that this, another of his ancient allies, had not been more faithful to him in his adversity than La Fin. These two witnesses, indeed, decided his fate; as the letters which were produced against him, were proved to have been written before the previous pardon granted to him by Henry at Lyons, and they were consequently of no avail as regarded the present accusation.

The Parliament was presided by Messire Pomponne de Bellièvre, Chancellor of France, beside whom the maréchal was invited to take his place upon a low wooden stool. Matthieu asserts that, although neither duke nor peer had obeyed the summons of the chambers, the number of his judges nevertheless amounted to one hundred and twelve;* and it is probable that this very fact gave him confidence, as during the two long hours occupied by his trial he never once lost his self-possession, but argued as closely, and as sagaciously as though he had yielded to no previous intemperance of language. He urged the pardon previously accorded to him by the King; earnestly protested that he had never entered into any cabal against the throne or dignity of his sovereign; and denied that any man could be proved a traitor, whatever might be his wishes, so long as he made no effort to realize them. He admitted that he might have talked rashly, but appealed to his judges whether he had not proved himself equally reckless in the field;

* L'Etoile computes them at one hundred and twenty-seven.—*Jour. de Henri IV.*, vol. iii, p. 21.

and required them to declare if so venial a fault had not, by that fact, already been sufficiently expiated. He then recapitulated the events of his career as a military leader; but he did so temperately and modestly, without a trace of the arrogant bombast for which he had throughout his life been celebrated. So great was the effect of this unexpected and manly dignity, that many members of the court were seen to shed tears; and had his fate been decided upon the instant, it is probable that his calm and touching eloquence might have saved his life; but so much time had already been exhausted that enough did not remain for collecting the votes, and the result of the trial was consequently deferred; the maréchal meanwhile returning to the Bastille under the same escort which had conveyed him to the capital.*

On the 29th, the chambers having again assembled, remained in deliberation from six o'clock in the morning until two hours after mid-day, when sentence of death was unanimously pronounced against the prisoner; and he was condemned to lose his head in the Place de Grève, "as attainted and convicted of having outraged the person of the King, and conspired against his kingdom; all his property to be confiscated, his peerage reunited to the crown; and himself shorn of all his honours and dignities."

On the following day, the decision of the Parliament

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 205.

having been made public, immense crowds collected in the Place de Grève in order to witness the execution; scaffoldings were erected on every side for the accommodation of the spectators; and the tumult at length became so great that it reached the ears of the maréchal in his prison-chamber; who, rushing to the window, whence he could command a view of some portion of the open fields leading to the Rue St. Antoine, along which numerous groups were still making their eager way, exclaimed, in violent emotion: "I have been judged, and I am a dead man." One of his guards hastened to assure him that the outcry was occasioned by a quarrel between two nobles, which was about to terminate in a duel; and the unhappy prisoner thus remained for a short time in uncertainty as to his ultimate fate. Yet still, as he sat in his dreary chamber, he heard the continued murmur of the excited citizens, who, believing that he was to be put to death by torch-light, persisted in holding their weary watch until an hour before midnight.*

The King had, however, determined to postpone the execution until the morrow; when, apparently yielding to the solicitations of the duke's family, but, as many surmised, anxious to avoid a tumult which the great popularity of Biron with the troops, and the numerous friends and followers whom he possessed about the court, led him to apprehend might prove the result of so public

* Matthieu, Hist. des Troubles, Book II, pp. 426, 427.

a disgrace to his surviving relatives, Henry consented to change the place of execution to the court of the Bastille, where the maréchal accordingly lost his head at five o'clock in the evening. The circumstances attending his decapitation are too painful for detail; suffice it that his last struggles for life displayed a cowardice which ill accorded with his previous gallantry, and that it was only by a feint that the executioner at last succeeded in performing his ghastly office; while so great had been the violence of the victim, that his head bounded three times upon the scaffold, and emitted more blood than the trunk from which it had been severed.

It was said that the father of the culprit, the former maréchal, had on one occasion, during an exhibition of the violence in which Biron so continually indulged, bitterly exclaimed: "I would advise you, Baron, as soon as peace is signed, to go and plant cabbages on your estate, or you will one day bring your head to the scaffold."* A fearful prophecy fearfully fulfilled.

The corpse was conveyed to the church of St. Paul, where it was interred without any ceremony, but surrounded by a dense mass of the populace, many of whom openly pitied his fate, and lamented over his fall.†

La Fin and Renazé were pardoned; but Hubert, the secretary of the maréchal, suffered "the question," both ordinary and extraordinary, and was condemned to per-

* Montfaucon, vol. v, p. 410.

† Péréfixe, vol. ii, p. 377. Mezeray, vol. x, p. 209.

petual imprisonment, having refused to make any confession. He was, however, a short time subsequently, restored to liberty; but the remembrance of all that he had undergone rankled at his heart, and he no sooner found himself once more free than he abandoned his country, and withdrew to Spain, where he passed the remainder of his life.

The Baron de Luz, who had revealed all he knew of the conspiracy on the promise of a free pardon, was not only forgiven for the share which he had taken in the plot, but had moreover all his appointments confirmed; and was made governor of the castle of Dijon and the town of Beaune. The governorship of Burgundy, vacant by the death of Biron, was given to the Dauphin; and the lieutenancy of the province was conferred upon the Duke de Bellegarde, by whom the young Prince was ultimately succeeded in the higher dignity.

A Breton nobleman, named Montbarot,* was committed to the Bastille on suspicion of being involved in the cabal; but no proof of his participation having transpired, he was shortly afterwards liberated.

The Duke de Bouillon, who was conscious that he

* Réné de Marée-Montbarot, Governor of Rennes, in 1602. Wrongly suspected of complicity with Biron, he made no effort to evade the consequences of the accusation, but suffered himself to be arrested in the seat of his government, whence he was conveyed to the Bastille; and although he succeeded in establishing his innocence, he found himself, on his liberation, deprived of his office.

had not been altogether guiltless of participation in the crime for which the less cautious Biron had just suffered death, deeming it expedient to provide for his own safety, took refuge in his viscounty of Turenne, where, however, he did not long remain inactive; and reports of his continued disaffection having reached the ears of the King, he was, in his turn, summoned to the royal presence in order to justify himself; but the example of his decapitated friend was still too recent to encourage him to such a concession; and instead of presenting himself at court he dispatched thither a very eloquent letter, in which he informed the monarch, that, being aware of the falsehood and artifice of his accusers, he entreated him to dispense with his appearance in the capital; and to approve instead, that, for the satisfaction of his Majesty, the French nation, and his own honour, he should present himself before the chamber of Castres; that assembly forming an integral portion of the Parliament of Toulouse, which held jurisdiction over his own viscounty of Turenne. Having forwarded this missive to the sovereign, he hastened to Castres, where he appeared as he had suggested, and caused his presence to be registered. The determination of Henry to compel his attendance at Paris was, however, only strengthened by this act of defiance; and having ascertained that the King was about to dispatch a messenger to compel his obedience, M. de Bouillon left Castres in haste for Orange, whence he proceeded, by way of Geneva, to Heidelberg, and

placed himself under the protection of the Prince Palatine, after having declared his innocence to Elizabeth of England and the other Protestant sovereigns, and entreated their support and mediation.

Thus far, with the exception of Biron himself, all the members of this famous conspiracy had escaped with their lives, and some among them without loss, either of freedom or of property; one of their number, however, was fated to be less fortunate, and this one was the Baron de Fontenelles,* a man of high family, who had for several years rendered himself peculiarly obnoxious to the King and his ministers, and whose

* Guy Eder de Beaumanoir de Lavardin, Baron de Fontenelles, was a Breton noble, who, according to de Thou, had been a celebrated Leaguer and brigand. From the year 1597, he had held, in the name of the Duke de Mercœur, the fort of Douarnene in Brittany, and the island of Tristain in which it is situated. Since that period he had continually been guilty of acts of piracy upon the English, and had even extended his system of theft and murder indiscriminately both on sea and land. He might, had he been willing so to do, have profited by the benefit of the edict accorded to the Duke de Mercœur in 1598, but he affected to hold it as a point of honour to obtain a distinct one for himself, and he even appears to have continued in the enjoyment of his government despite this obstinacy; but having been convicted, during a period of profound peace, of maintaining an intelligence with the Spaniards, he was made prisoner by a stratagem, by Nicolas Rapin, provost of the connétablie (or constable's jurisdiction), as an accomplice of the Duke de Biron, as he was on the point of delivering up both the fort and the island to his dangerous allies.

atrocious barbarities caused him to fall unpitied. This wretched man, after having been put to the torture, was, by the sentence pronounced against him by the council, broken alive upon the wheel, where he suffered the greatest agony during an hour and a half. His lieutenant was hung and strangled for having been the medium of his communication with the Spanish Government; although, even as he was ascending the fatal ladder, he continued to declare that he had always been ignorant of the contents of the packets which he was charged to deliver, and could neither read nor write.*

With the life of Biron, the conspiracy had terminated; while his fate had not failed to produce universal consternation. His devotion to the early fortunes of the King had been at once so great and so efficient, his military renown was so universally acknowledged, and his favour with the monarch was so apparently beyond the reach of chance or change, that his unhappy end pointed a moral even to the proudest, and so paralyzed the spirit of those who might otherwise have felt inclined to question the royal authority, that even the nearest and dearest of his friends uttered no murmur; while those individuals who had dreaded to find themselves compromised by his ruin, and who, to their equal surprise and satisfaction, discovered that, while he had unguardedly preserved all the papers which could tend to his own

* L'Etoile, vol. x, pp. 36, 37.

destruction, he had destroyed every vestige of their own criminality, rejoiced at their escape, and flattered themselves that their participation in his treachery would for ever remain undiscovered; a circumstance which rendered them at once patient and silent.

That the necessity for taking the life of the maréchal had been bitterly felt by the King himself, we have already shown; and it was further evinced when he declared to those who interceded for the doomed man, that had his personal interests alone been threatened by the treason of the criminal, he should have found it easy to pardon the wrong that had been done him; but that, when he looked into the future, and remembered that the safety of the kingdom which had been confided to him, and of the son who was to succeed him upon the throne, must both be compromised by sparing one who had already proved that his loyalty could not be purchased by mercy, he held himself bound to secure both against an evil for which there was no other safeguard than the infliction of the law.

Many argued, that, having spared the lives of the Dukes of Epernon, Bouillon, and Mayenne,* all of

* Charles de Lorraine, Duke de Mayenne, was the second son of François de Lorraine, Duke de Guise, and was born in 1554. He distinguished himself at the sieges of Poitiers and La Rochelle, and at the battle of Montcontour, and fought successfully against the Calvinists in Guienne and Saintonge. His brothers having been killed at the states of Blois, in 1588, he declared himself chief of the League, and assumed the title of lieutenant-general

whom had at different times been in arms against him, Henry might equally have shown mercy to Biron; but while they urged this reasoning, they omitted to remember that the political crime of these three nobles had not been aggravated, like that of the maréchal, by private wrong; and that they had not, by an unyielding obstinacy, and an ungrateful pertinacity in rebellion, exhausted the forbearance of an indulgent monarch. Moreover, Biron, in grasping at sovereignty, had not hesitated to invite the intrusion of foreign and hostile troops into the French territory, or to betray the exigences and difficulties of the army under his own command to his dangerous allies; thus weakening for the moment, and perilling for the future, the resources of a frank and trusting master; two formidable facts, which at once justified the severity alike of his King, and of his judges.

of the kingdom and crown of France; and by virtue of this self-created authority, caused the Cardinal de Bourbon to be declared King, under the name of Charles X. Having inherited the hatred of his brothers for Henry III., and his successor, Henry IV., he marched eighty thousand men against the latter Prince, but was defeated, both at Arques and Ivry. He annihilated the faction of the Sixteen; and was ultimately compelled to effect a reconciliation with the King in 1599, when Henry IV., with his usual clemency, not only pardoned his past opposition, but bestowed upon him the government of the Isle of France. The Duke de Mayenne died in 1611, leaving by his wife, Henriette de Savoie, daughter of the Count de Tende, one son, Henry, who died without issue in 1621.

The lesson was a salutary one to the French nobility; who had, from long impunity, learnt to regard their personal relations with foreign princes as matters beyond the authority of the sovereign, and which could involve neither their safety nor their honour; for it taught them that the highest head in the realm might fall under an accusation of treason; and that, powerful as each might be in his own province or his own government, he was still responsible to the monarch for the manner in which he used that power, and answerable to the laws of his country should he be rash enough to abuse it.

That Henry felt and understood that such must necessarily be the effect produced by the fate of the maréchal, there can be little doubt; as well as that he was still further induced to impress so wholesome a conviction upon the minds of his haughty aristocracy by the probability of a minority, during which the disorders incident to so many conflicting and imaginary claims could not fail to convulse the kingdom, and to endanger the stability of the throne; while it is no less evident that, once having forced upon their reason a conviction of his own ability to compel obedience where his authority was resisted, and to assert his sovereign privilege where he felt it to be essential to the preservation of the realm, he evinced no desire to extend his severity beyond its just limits. Thus, as we have seen, with the exception of the Baron de Fontenelles, who had drawn down upon himself the terrible expiation of a cruel death, rather by a long

succession of crime than by his association in the conspiracy of Biron, all the other criminals already judged had escaped the due punishment of their fault; while the Count d'Auvergne, after having been detained during a couple of months in the Bastille, was restored to liberty at the intercession of his sister, Madame de Verneuil; who pledged herself to the monarch that he was guilty only in so far that he had been faithful to the trust reposed in him by the maréchal, and had forborne to betray his secret; while he had never actively participated in the conspiracy. She moreover assured Henry, who was only anxious to find an opportunity of pardoning the count—an anxiety which the tears and intercessions of the marquise, as well as his own respect for the blood of the Valois inherited by d'Auvergne from his royal father, tended naturally to increase—that the prisoner was prepared, since the death of Biron had liberated him from all further necessity for silence, to communicate to his Majesty every particular of which he was cognizant. The concession was accepted; the count made the promised revelations; and his liberation was promptly followed by a renewal of the King's favour.

Towards the close of the year, intelligence having reached Henry that the Prince de Joinville, who was serving in the army of the Archduke, had, in his turn, suffered himself to be seduced from his allegiance by the Spaniards, he gave instant orders for his arrest; but the Prince no sooner found himself a prisoner, than he

declared his readiness to confess everything, provided he were permitted to do so to the King in person, and in the presence of Sully. His terms were complied with; and, as both Henry and his minister had anticipated from the frivolous and inconsequent character of their new captive, it at once became apparent that no idea of treason had been blent with the follies of which he had been guilty, but that they had merely owed their origin to his idle love of notoriety. A correspondence with Spain had become, as we have shown, the fashion at the French court; and Joinville had accordingly, in order to increase his importance, resolved to affect in his turn an understanding with that country. During his audience of the King he so thoroughly betrayed the childish puerility of his proceedings, that the monarch at once resolved to treat him as a silly and headstrong youth, towards whom any extreme measure of severity would be alike unnecessary and undignified; and he had consequently no sooner heard his narration to an end, than he desired the presence of his mother the Duchess de Guise, and his brother the duke;* and as they entered the royal

* Charles de Lorraine, Duke de Guise, born in 1571, was the son of Henry, Duke de Guise, who was assassinated at the states of Blois, in 1588. At the period of his father's death he was conveyed to the castle of Tours, where he was retained a prisoner until August, 1591, when he effected his escape, a circumstance which materially changed the fortunes of the League. The general impression in the capital had been that he would become the husband of the Infanta Isabel, the daughter of Philip I. of Spain, who would cause him to be proclaimed King; an ar-

closet, somewhat startled by so sudden a summons, he said, directing their attention to the delinquent; "There stands the prodigal son in person; he has filled his head with follies; but I shall treat him as a child, and forgive him for your sakes, although only on condition that you reprimand him seriously; and that you, my nephew," addressing himself particularly to the duke; "become his guarantee for the future. I place him in your charge, in order that you may teach him wisdom, if it be possible."

In obedience to this command, M. de Guise, who was well aware with how rash and intemperate a spirit he was called upon to contend, at once, with the royal sanction, reconducted him to his prison; where, during several months, the young Prince exhausted himself in threats, murmurs, and every species of verbal extrava-

rangement which the Duke de Feria, the Spanish ambassador, proposed to the League, in 1593. The Legate, the Sixteen, and the doctors of the Sorbonne, alike favoured this election; and the negociations proceeded so far that the Spaniards and Neapolitans in Paris rendered him regal honours. The young Prince, who had at this period only attained his twenty-second year, expressed great indignation at being made the puppet of so absurd a comedy, feeling convinced that neither the Duke de Mayenne, or the Duke de Nemours, both of whom coveted the crown, would finally favour his accession; and there can be little doubt that the state of extreme poverty to which he was reduced at the time, caused him to consider the project as still more extravagant than he might otherwise have done; it being stated (*Mém. pour l'Hist. de France*) that his servants were, on one occasion, compelled to pawn one of his cloaks and his saddle-cloth, in order to furnish him with a dinner.

gance; until wearied by the monotony of confinement, he finally subsided into repentance; and was, upon his earnest promise of amendment, permitted to exchange his chamber in the Bastille for a less stringent captivity in the château de Dampierre.* Such was the lenient punishment of the last of the conspirators; and it was assuredly a clever stroke of policy in the monarch thus to cast a shade of ridicule over the close of the cabal; which, having commenced with a tragedy, had, by his contemptuous forbearance, almost terminated in an epigram.

The court, after having passed a portion of the summer at St. Germain, removed in the commencement of August to Fontainebleau; the advanced pregnancy of the Queen having rendered her anxious to return to that palace. But any gratification which she might have promised herself, in this her favourite place of residence, was cruelly blighted by the legitimation of the son of Madame de Verneuil, which was formally registered at this period. Nor was this the only vexation to which she was exposed, the notoriety of the King's intrigues becoming every day more trying alike to her temper and to her health; while the new concession which had been made to the vanity—or, as the marquise herself deemed it, to the honour—of the favourite, induced the latter to commit the most indecent excesses; and to increase, if possible, the almost regal magnificence of her attire and

* Sully, Mém., vol. iv, pp. 128, 129. Daniel, vol. vii, p. 423. Mezeray, vol. x, p. 219.

her establishment; at the same time that her deportment towards the Queen was marked by an insolent disrespect which involved the whole court in perpetual misunderstandings.

As it had already become only too evident that the unfortunate Marie de Medicis possessed but little influence over the affections of her husband, however he might be compelled to respect the perfect propriety and dignity of her character, the cabal of the favourite daily increased in importance; and the measure of the Queen's mortification overflowed, when, soon after the royal visit to Fontainebleau, Henry took leave of her in order to visit Calais, and she ascertained that he had on his way stopped at the château de Verneuil, whither he had been accompanied by the marquise. It was in vain that M. de Sully—to whom the King had given strict charge to endeavour by every method in his power to reconcile the Queen to his absence, and to provide for her amusement every diversion of which she was in a condition to partake—exerted himself to obey the command of the monarch; Marie was too deeply wounded to derive any consolation from such puerile sources; nor was it until the return of her royal consort, when his evident anxiety and increased tenderness once more led her to believe that she might finally wean him from his excesses, and attach him to herself, that she once more became calm.

On the 11th of November the anticipated event took place, and the Queen gave birth to her eldest

daughter,* in the same oval chamber in which the Dauphin first saw the light.† The advent of Elizabeth of France was not, however, hailed with the same delight by Marie, as had been that of her first-born; on the contrary, her disappointment was extreme on ascertaining the sex of the infant, from the fact of her having placed the most entire confidence in the assurances of a devotee named Sœur Ange, who had been recommended to her notice and protection by the Sovereign-Pontiff; and who had, before she herself became cognisant of the negociations for her marriage, foretold that she would one day be Queen of France. This woman, who still remained in her service, had repeatedly assured her that she need be under no apprehension of bearing daughters, as she was predestined by Heaven to become the mother of three princes only; and after having, with her usual superstition, placed implicit faith in the flattering prophecy, Marie no sooner discovered its fallacy than she abandoned herself to the most violent grief, refusing to listen to the consolations of her attendants, and bewailing herself that she should have been so cruelly deceived; until the King, although he in some measure participated in her annoyance, succeeded in restoring her to composure, by bidding her remember that had she not been of the same sex as the child of which she had just made him the father, she could not

* Elisabeth de France, who married, in 1615, Philip IV. of Spain.

† Bassompierre, Mém., p. 26.

have herself realised the previous prediction of Sœur Ange; an argument which, coupled with the probability that the august infant beside her might in her turn ascend an European throne, was, in all probability, the most efficacious one which could have been adopted to reconcile her to its present comparative insignificance.

CHAPTER IV.

[1603.]

COURT FESTIVITIES—MADAME DE VERNEUIL IS LODGED IN THE PALACE—SHE GIVES BIRTH TO A DAUGHTER—REGAL QUARRELS—MADEMOISELLE DE GUISE—ITALIAN ACTORS—REVOLT AT METZ—HENRY PROCEEDS THITHER, AND SUPPRESSES THE REBELLION—DISCONTENT OF THE DUKE D'EPERNON—THE DUCHESS DE BAR AND THE DUKE DE LORRAINE ARRIVE IN FRANCE—ILLNESS OF QUEEN ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND—HER DEATH—INDISPOSITION OF THE FRENCH KING—SULLY AT FONTAINÉBLEAU—CONFIDENCE OF HENRY IV. IN HIS WIFE—HIS RECOVERY—RENEWED PASSION OF HENRY FOR MADAME DE VERNEUIL—ANGER OF THE QUEEN—QUARREL OF THE COUNT DE SOISSONS AND THE DUKE DE SULLY—THE EDICT—TREACHERY OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—INSOLENCE OF THE COUNT DE SOISSONS—A ROYAL REBUKE—ALARM OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—HOPES OF THE QUEEN—JEALOUSY OF THE MARQUISE—THE DINNER AT ROSNY—THE KING PACIFIES THE PROVINCE OF LOWER NORMANDY—THE COUNT DE SOISSONS PREPARES TO LEAVE THE KINGDOM—IS DISSUADED BY THE KING—OFFICIAL APOLOGY OF SULLY—RECEPTION OF ALEXANDRE-MONSIEUR INTO THE ORDER OF THE KNIGHTS OF MALTA—DEATH OF THE DUCHESS DE BAR—GRIEF OF THE KING—THE PAPAL NUNCIO—TREACHERY NEAR THE THRONE—A REVELATION—THE DUKE DE VILLEROY—A STORMY AUDIENCE—ESCAPE OF L'HÔTE—HIS PURSUIT—HIS DEATH—IGNOMINIOUS TREATMENT OF HIS BODY—MADAME DE VERNEUIL ASSERTS HER CLAIM TO THE HAND OF THE KING—THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE RETIRES FROM THE COURT—MADAME DE VERNEUIL REQUESTS PERMISSION TO QUIT FRANCE—REPLY OF THE KING—INDIGNATION OF MARIE—THE KING RESOLVES TO OBTAIN T' 'S WRITTEN PROMISE OF MARRIAGE—INSOLENCE OF THE FAVOURITE—WEAKNESS OF HENRY—HE ASKS THE ADVICE OF SULLY—PARALLEL BETWEEN A WIFE AND A MISTRESS—A LAME APOLOGY—THE TWO HENRYS—RECONCILIATION BETWEEN THE KING AND THE FAVOURITE—REMONSTRANCES OF SULLY—A DELICATE

DILEMMA—EXTRAVAGANCE OF THE QUEEN—THE "POT DE VIN"—THE ROYAL LETTER—EVIL INFLUENCES—HENRY ENDEAVOURS TO EFFECT A RECONCILIATION WITH THE QUEEN — DIFFICULT DIPLOMACY — A TEMPORARY CALM — RENEWED DIFFERENCES — A MINISTER AT FAULT —MADEMOISELLE DE LA BOURDAISIÈRE—MADEMOISELLE DE BEUIL— JEALOUSY OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL — CONSPIRACY OF THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE—INTEMPERANCE OF THE QUEEN—TIMELY INTERFERENCE —CONFIDENCE ACCORDED BY THE QUEEN TO SULLY—A DANGEROUS SUGGESTION—SULLY RECONCILES THE ROYAL COUPLE—MADAME DE VERNEUIL IS EXILED FROM THE COURT—SHE JOINS THE CONSPIRACY OF HER BROTHER — THE FORGED CONTRACT — APOLOGY OF THE COUNT D'ENTRAGUES—PROMISES OF PHILIP OF SPAIN TO THE CONSPIRATORS —DUPLICITY OF THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE—HE IS PARDONED BY THE KING—HIS TREACHERY SUSPECTED BY M. DE LOMENIE—D'AUVERGNE ESCAPES TO HIS GOVERNMENT—IS MADE PRISONER, AND CONVEYED TO THE BASTILLE—HIS SELF-CONFIDENCE — A DEVOTED WIFE—THE REQUIREMENTS OF A PRISONER—HIDDEN DOCUMENTS—THE TREATY WITH SPAIN—THE COUNTESS D'ENTRAGUES—HAUGHTY DEMEANOUR OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—THE MISTRESS AND THE MINISTER—MORTIFICATION OF SULLY—MARRIAGE OF MADEMOISELLE DE BEUIL —HENRY EMBELLISHES THE CITY OF PARIS, AND UNDERTAKES OTHER GREAT NATIONAL WORKS.

CHAPTER IV.

[1603.]

A FEW weeks after the birth of Madame Elizabeth, the court returned to Paris; where, in honour of the little Princess, several ballets were danced, and a grand banquet was given to the sovereigns by the nobility; but the heart of the Queen was too full of chagrin to enable her to assist with even a semblance of gratification in the festivities by which those around her were absorbed. The new-born tenderness lately exhibited by her husband had gradually diminished; while the assumption of the favourite, who was once more in her turn about to become a mother, exceeded all decent limits. The daily, and almost hourly disputes between the royal couple were renewed with greater bitterness than ever; and when, on the 21st of January, Madame de Verneuil, like herself, and again under the same roof, gave birth to a daughter,* Marie de

* Gabrielle-Angelique de Bourbon, who was declared legally legitimate as her brother had previously been, married, in 1622, Bernard de la Valette et de Foix, Duke d'Epernon, and died in child-birth, in April, 1627.

Medicis no longer attempted to suppress the violence of her indignation; nor was it until the King, alike chafed and bewildered by her upbraidings, declared that should she persist in rendering his existence one of perpetual turmoil and discomfort, he would fulfil his former threat of compelling her to quit the kingdom, that he could induce her to desist from receiving him with complaints and reproaches. Henry was aware that he had discovered, by the assertion of this resolve, a certain method of silencing his unfortunate consort; who, had she been childless, would in all probability gladly have sacrificed her ambition to her sense of dignity; but Marie was a mother, and she felt that her own destiny must be blended with that of her offspring. Thus, she had nothing left to her save to submit; and deeply as she suffered from the indignities which were heaped upon her as a wife, she shrank from a prospect so appalling as a separation from the innocent beings to whom she had given life.

Meanwhile the King, wearied alike of the exigences of his mistress, and the cold, unbending deportment of the Queen, again made approaches to Mademoiselle de Guise, upon whom he had already, a year or two previously, lavished all those attentions which bespoke alike his admiration and his designs; but he was not destined to be more successful with this lady than before; her intimacy with the Queen, to whose household she was attached, rendering her still more averse than formerly to encourage the licentious addresses of

the monarch. The excitement of this new passion nevertheless, sufficed for a time to wean Henry from his old favourite; and forgetting his age in his anxiety to win the favour of the beautiful and witty Marguerite, he appeared on the 19th of February, in a rich suit of white satin, in the court of the Tuileries, where he had invited the nobles of the court to run at the ring, and acquitted himself so dextrously that he twice carried it off amid the acclamations of the spectators.

From this period until the end of the month, the royal circle were engaged in one continual succession of festivities; of which high play, banquets, ballets, balls, (at the latter of which a species of dance denominated *Braules*, and corrupted by the English into *Brawls*, which became afterwards so popular at the court of Elizabeth, was of constant occurrence, as well as the *Corranto*, a livelier but less graceful movement;) and theatrical representations, formed the principal features. An Italian company invited to France by the Queen, under the management of Isabella Andrëini, also appeared before the court, but no record is left of the nature of their performance.*

From this temporary oblivion of all political anxiety, Henry was, however, suddenly aroused by a rumour which reached the court of a revolt in the town of

* Matthieu, Hist. de Henri IV., vol. ii, Book vi, p. 446.

Metz, which proved to be only too well founded. For some time previously great discontent had existed among the citizens, who considered themselves aggrieved by the tyranny of the two lieutenants* of the Duke d'Epernon their governor; and to such a height had their opposition to this delegated authority at length risen, that the duke found himself compelled to proceed to the city, in order, if possible, to reconcile the conflicting parties. This intelligence had no sooner been communicated to the King, than he resolved to profit by so favourable an opportunity of repossessing himself, not only of the town itself, but of the whole province of Messin, in order to disable the Duke d'Epernon, (against whom his suspicions had already been aroused,) from making hereafter a disloyal use of the power which his authority over so important a territory afforded to him of contravening the measures of the sovereign. The fortress was one of great importance to Henry, who was aware of the necessity of placing it in the safe keeping of an individual upon whom he could place the fullest and most perfect reliance; and the rather that M. d'Epernon had, during the reign of Henry III., rather assumed in Metz the state of a sovereign prince than fulfilled the functions of its governor; and that he would, as the King at once felt,

* Raimond de Comminge, Sieur de Sobole, and his brother, noblemen of Gascony.

if not opposed, resist any encroachment upon his self-constituted privileges. The revolt of the Messinese, (for, as was soon ascertained, the disaffection was not confined to the city, but extended throughout the whole of the adjoining country,) afforded an admirable opening for the royal interposition; and Henry instantly decided upon visiting the province in person, accompanied by his whole court, before the two factions should have time to reconcile their differences, and to deprecate his interference. At the close of February he accordingly commenced his journey, despite the inclemency of the weather, and the unfavourable condition of the roads, which rendered travelling difficult and at times even dangerous for the Queen and her attendant ladies; and pretexting a visit to his sister the Duchess de Bar, he advanced to Verdun, where he remained for a few days, ere he finally made his entry into Metz.

So unexpected an apparition paralysed all parties. M. d'Epernon having refused to consent to the removal of Sobole, who was, as he knew, devoted to his interests, had failed to appease the indignation of the Messinese, who were consequently eager to obtain justice from the King; while Sobole himself, after a momentary vision of fortifying the citadel, and defying the royal authority, became convinced that his design was not feasible; and he accordingly obeyed without a murmur the sentence of banishment pronounced against

him, gave up the fortress unconditionally, and left the province.

Sobole had no sooner resigned his trust, than the King appointed M. de Montigny lieutenant-governor of the province of Messin; and his brother, M. d'Arquien,* lieutenant-governor of the town and fortress; while the garrison was replaced by a portion of the body-guard by which the monarch had been accompanied from the capital.

The vexation of the Duke d'Epernon was extreme, but he dared not expostulate, although he at once perceived that his power was annihilated. So long as his lieutenants had been creatures of his own, his dominion over the province had been absolute; but when they were thus replaced by officers of the King's selection, his influence became merely nominal; so great, moreover, had been the tact of Henry, that he had found means to compel the duke himself to solicit the dismissal of Sobole and his brother, in order to assure his own tenure of office; and he was consequently placed in a position which rendered all semblance of discontent impossible; while the citizens delighted to find themselves thus unexpectedly revenged upon their oppressors, and proud of the presence of the sovereigns within their walls, were profuse in their demonstrations of loyalty and attachment.

* Antoine, Seigneur d'Arquien, was Governor of Calais, Sancerre, &c.

A slight indisposition having detained the King for a longer period than he had anticipated at Metz, the Duchess de Bar, the Duke de Lorraine, and the Duke and Duchess de Deux-Ponts, arrived on the 16th of March to welcome him to the province; and a series of entertainments was given to these distinguished guests which was long matter of tradition among the Messinese; and which resulted in the betrothal of Mademoiselle de Rohan and the young Duke de Deux-Ponts.*

While still sojourning at Metz, information reached Henry of the serious illness of Elizabeth of England; a despatch having been forwarded to the monarch by the Count de Beaumont,† his ambassador at the court of London, informing him of the apprehensions which were entertained that her Majesty could not survive so grave a malady. The effect of this intelligence was to induce the King to hasten his return to his capital, and he, accordingly, prepared for immediate departure; but he was finally prevailed upon to sojourn for a few days at Nancy, where Madame (his sister) had prepared a magnificent ballet, which was accordingly performed, greatly to the admiration of the two courts. Henry,

* Jean Henri, Duke de Deux-Ponts, who married Catherine de Rohan, was descended from a branch of the royal house of Bavaria.

† Christophe de Harlai, Count de Beaumont, Governor of Orleans. He died in 1615.

however, whose anxiety exceeded all bounds, caused courier after courier to be dispatched for tidings of the illustrious invalid, and took little share in the festivities which were designed to do him honour. He was probably on the eve, as he declared in a letter to the Duke de Sully, of losing an ally who was the enemy of his enemies, and a second self, while he was totally ignorant of the views and feelings of her successor.

His forebodings were verified, for ere the court left Nancy, Elizabeth had breathed her last; which intelligence was immediately conveyed to him, together with the assurance that her council had secured the person of the Lady Arabella Stuart, the cousin of the King of Scotland, and that there was consequently nothing to fear as regarded the succession. The death of Elizabeth did not in fact in any respect affect the relative position of the two countries; neither Henry IV. nor James I. being desirous to terminate the good understanding which existed between them; and on the 30th of July, a treaty of confederation was concluded between the two sovereigns by Sully, in which they were mutually pledged to protect the United Provinces of the Low Countries against their common enemy Philip of Spain.

But, notwithstanding the apparent certainty of a continuance of his amicable relations with England, whether it were that this fatal intelligence operated upon the bodily health of the King, or that his hasty journey homeward had overtaxed his strength, it is

certain that on reaching Fontainebleau, he had so violent an attack of fever as to be compelled to countermand the council which had been convened for the third day after his arrival. The court physicians, bewildered by so sudden and severe an illness, declared the case to be an hopeless one; while Henry himself, believing that his end was approaching, caused a letter to be written to Sully to desire his immediate attendance.* So fully, indeed, did he appear to anticipate a fatal termination of the attack, that while awaiting the arrival of the minister, he caused the portrait of the Dauphin to be brought to him; and after remaining for a few seconds with his eyes earnestly fixed upon it, he exclaimed, with a deep sigh: "Ha! poor child, what will you have to suffer if your father should be taken from you!"†

Sully lost no time in obeying the melancholy summons of the King; and, on arriving at Fontainebleau, at once made his way to the royal chamber, where he indeed found Henry in his bed, but with no symptoms of immediate dissolution visible either in his countenance or manner. The Queen sat beside him with one of his hands clasped in hers; and as he remarked the entrance of the duke, he extended the other exclaiming: "Come and embrace me, my friend; I rejoice at your arrival. Within two hours after I had written to you, I was in a great degree relieved from pain; and I have since gradually recovered from the attack. Here," he con-

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 94.

† Capefigue, vol. viii, p. 163.

tinued, turning towards the Queen; "is the most trustworthy and intelligent of all my servants, who would have assisted you better than any other in the preservation alike of my kingdom and of my children, had I been taken away. I am aware that her humour is somewhat austere, and at times perhaps too independent for a mind like yours; and that there would not have been many wanting who might, in consequence, have endeavoured to alienate from her the affections of yourself and of my children; but should it ever be so, do not yield too ready a credence to their words. I sent for her expressly that I might consult with both of you upon the best method to avert so great an evil; but, thanks be to God, I feel that such a precaution was in this instance unnecessary."*

Sully, in describing this scene, withholds all comment upon the King's perfect confidence in the heart and intellect of his royal consort; but none can fail to feel that the moment must have been a proud one for Marie, in which she became conscious that the nobler features of her character had been thoroughly appreciated by her husband. The vanity of the woman could well afford to slumber while the value of the wife and of the Queen was thus openly and generously acknowledged.

And truly did Marie de Medicis need a memory like this to support her throughout her unceasing trials; for scarcely had the King recovered sufficient strength to encounter the exertion than he determined to remove to Paris; and, having intimated his wish to the Queen,

* Sully, Mém., vol. iv, pp. 197—199.

immediate preparations were made for their departure. They arrived in the capital totally unexpected at nine o'clock in the morning, and alighted at the Hôtel de Gondy, where Henry took a temporary leave of his wife, and hastened to the residence of Madame de Verneuil, with whom he remained until an hour after mid-day; thence he proceeded to the abode of M. le Grand with whom he dined; nor was it until a late hour that he rejoined the Queen,* who at once became aware that the temporary separation between the monarch and his favourite, occasioned by the journey to Metz, had failed to produce the effect which she had been sanguine enough to anticipate.

Nor did Marie deceive herself; for, during the sojourn of the court at Paris, which lasted until the month of June, Henry abandoned himself with even less reserve than formerly to his passion for the marquise; while the forsaken Queen—who hourly received information of the impertinent assumption of that lady, and who was assured that she had renewed with more arrogance, and more openly than ever, her pretended claim to the hand of the sovereign—unable to conceal her indignation, embittered the casual intercourse between herself and her royal consort with complaints and upbraidings which irritated and angered the King; and at length caused an estrangement between them greater than any which had hitherto existed. There can be little doubt that this period of Marie's

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 88, 89.

life was a most unhappy one. Deprived even of the presence of her children, who, from considerations of health, had been removed to St. Germain-en-Laye, and who could not in consequence be the solace of every weary hour, she found her only consolation in the society of her immediate household, and the zealous devotion of Madame de Concini; to whose first-born child she became joint sponsor with M. de Soissons, greatly to the annoyance of the King, who watched with a jealous eye the ever-increasing influence of the Florentine favourite.

Previously to her marriage with the Duke de Bar, Madame, the King's sister, had affianced herself to M. de Soissons; but the circumstance no sooner became known to Henry than he expressed his extreme distaste to such an union, and directed the Duke de Sully to expostulate with both parties, and to induce them, should it be possible, to abandon the project, and to give a written promise never to renew their engagement. In this difficult and delicate mission the minister ultimately succeeded; but, since that period, a coldness had existed between the two nobles which at length terminated in mutual dissension and avoidance. It was, consequently, with considerable surprise that while preparing for his embassy to England, where he was intrusted with the congratulations of his own sovereign to James I. on his accession, M. de Sully, found himself on one occasion addressed by the Prince in an accent of warmth and friendliness to which he had long been unaccustomed from his lips; and heard him cordially

express his obligation for some service which, in his official capacity, the minister had lately rendered him, and declare that thenceforward he should never recur to the past, but rather trust that for the future they might be firm and fast friends. Sully answered in the same spirit; and thus a misunderstanding which had disturbed the whole court, where each had partisans who violently defended his cause, and thus rendered the schism more serious than it might otherwise have been, was apparently terminated; but the duke had no sooner returned to France than it was renewed more bitterly than ever, to the extreme annoyance of the King, who was reluctant to interfere; the high rank of M. de Soissons on the one hand, and the eminent services of Sully on the other, rendering him equally averse to dissatisfy either party.

In the month of August, 1603, the Duke de Soissons, whose lavish expenditure made it important to him to increase his income by some new concession on the part of the monarch, held an earnest consultation with Madame de Verneuil, with whom he was on the closest terms of intimacy, as to the most feasible method of effecting his object; and it was at length determined that the Prince should solicit the privilege of exacting a duty of fifteen sous upon every bale of cloth, either imported or exported throughout the kingdom; while the marquise pledged herself to exert her influence to induce the King to consent to the arrangement, for which service she was to receive one-fifth of the proceeds

resulting from the tax. Extraordinary as such a demand must appear in the present day, it was, according to Sully, by no means an unusual one at that period; when, by his rigorous retrenchments, he had greatly reduced the revenues of the court nobles, and put it out of the power of the monarch to bestow upon them, as he had formerly done, the most lavish sums from his own privy purse; thus inducing them to adopt every possible expedient in order to increase their diminished incomes. Sympathising with the annoyance of his impoverished courtiers, and anxious to silence their murmurs, the good-natured and reckless sovereign seldom met their requests with a denial, and from this abuse a number of petty taxes, each perhaps insignificant in itself, but in the aggregate amounting to a heavy infliction upon the people, were levied on all sides, and upon all pretences; and the evil at length became so serious that the prudent minister found it necessary to expostulate respectfully with his royal master upon the danger of such a system, and to entreat of him to discountenance any further imposts which had no tendency to increase the revenues of the state, but merely served to encourage the prodigality of the nobles.

It was precisely at this unpropitious moment that M. de Soissons proffered his demand, which was warmly seconded by Madame de Verneuil, who represented to the monarch the impossibility of his refusing a favour of this nature to a prince of the blood, when he had so frequently made concessions of the same nature to indi-

viduals of inferior rank; and the certainty that, were his request negatived, M. de Soissons would not fail to feel himself at once injured and aggrieved. Still, aware of the promise which had been extorted from him by Sully, the King hesitated; but upon being more ungently pressed by the favourite, he at length demanded what would be the probable yearly produce of the tax, when he was assured by the count that it could not exceed ten thousand crowns; upon which Henry, who was anxious not to irritate him by a refusal where the favour solicited was so comparatively insignificant, at once signified his compliance; and as the subject had been cleverly mooted by the two interested parties at Fontainebleau, while the minister of finance was absent in the capital, Madame de Verneuil, by dint of importunity, succeeded in inducing the monarch to sign an order for the immediate imposition of the duty in favour of M. de Soissons; but before he was prevailed upon to do this, he declared to the Prince that he should withdraw his consent to the arrangement, if it were proved that the produce of the tax exceeded the yearly sum of fifty thousand francs, or that it pressed too heavily upon the people and the commercial interests of the kingdom. This reservation was by no means palatable to M. de Soissons, who had, when questioned as to the amount likely to be derived from the transaction, answered rather from impulse than calculation; but as the said reservation was merely verbal, while the edict authorising the levy of the impost was tangible and valid, the Prince, after warmly

expressing his acknowledgments to the monarch, carried off the document without one misgiving of success.

Henry, however, when he began to reflect upon the nature of the concession which he had been prevailed upon to make, could not suppress a suspicion that it was more important than it had at first appeared; and, conscious that he had falsified his promise to the minister, he resolved to ascertain the extent of his imprudence. He accordingly, the same evening, dispatched a letter to Sully, in which, without divulging what had taken place, he directed him to ascertain the probable proceeds of such a tax, and the effect which it was likely to produce upon those on whom it would be levied.

So unexpected an inquiry startled the finance-minister, who instantly apprehended that a fresh attack had been made upon the indulgence of the monarch; and he forthwith anxiously commenced a calculation, based upon solid and well-authenticated documents, which resulted in a discovery that the annual amount of such an impost could not be less than three hundred thousand crowns; while it must necessarily so seriously affect the trade in flax and hemp, that it was likely to ruin the provinces of Brittany and Normandy, as well as a great part of Picardy.

Under these circumstances it was decided between Henry and his minister, that the latter should withhold his signature to the order which had been extorted from the King; without which, or a letter from the sovereign specially commanding the registration of the edict by the Parliament, the document was invalid. There can

be no doubt that the most manly and dignified course which the monarch could have adopted, would have been to inform M. de Soissons of the result of the verification which had been made; and to have declared that, in accordance with his expressed determination when conditionally conceding the edict, he had resolved, upon ascertaining the magnitude of the sum which must be levied by such a tax, not to permit its operation. This was not, however, the manner in which Henry met the difficulty. He felt that his position was an onerous one, and he gladly transferred his responsibility to M. de Sully; who accordingly, upon the application of the Prince for his signature, in order that the document might be laid before the Parliament and thus rendered available, declined to accede to the request; alleging that the affair was one of such extreme importance, that he dared not take upon himself to forward it without the concurrence of the council.

M. de Soissons urged and expostulated in vain; the minister was inflexible; and at length the Prince withdrew, but not before he had given vent to his indignation with a bitterness which convinced his listener that thenceforward all kindly feeling between them was at an end.

But if the count thus suffered himself to be defeated by a first refusal, Madame de Verneuil was by no means inclined to follow his example. Baffled but not beaten, she resolved upon returning to the charge; and accordingly she drove to the residence of the minister, and

met him at the door of his cabinet, as he was about to proceed to the Louvre, in order to have an interview with the King.

There was an expression of haughty defiance in the eye of the favourite, and a heightened colour upon her cheek, which at once betrayed to Sully the purpose of her visit; while he on his side received her with a calm courtesy which was ill calculated to inspire her with any hope of success; and she had scarcely seated herself before he gave her reason to perceive that he was as little inclined to temporise as herself. When they met he held in his hand a roll of paper, which, even after she had entered the apartment, he still continued to grasp with a pertinacity that did not fail to attract her attention.

"And what may be the precious document, Monsieur le Ministre," she demanded flippantly; "of which you find it so impossible to relax your hold?"

"A precious document indeed, Madam;" was the abrupt reply; "and one in which you figure among many others." So saying, he unrolled the scroll, and read aloud a list of edicts, solicited or granted, similar to that of the Count de Soissons, one of which bore her own name.

"And what are you about to do with it?" she asked.

"To make it the subject of a remonstrance to his Majesty."

"Truly," exclaimed the marquise, no longer able to control her rage; "the King will be well-advised should he listen to your caprices, and by so doing affront twenty individuals of the highest quality. Upon whom

should he confer such favours as these, if not upon the princes of the blood, his cousins, his relatives, and his mistresses?"

"That might be very well," replied the minister, totally unmoved by her insolence; "if the King could pay these sums out of his own privy purse; but that they should be levied upon the merchant, the artisan, and the labourer, is entirely out of the question. It is they who feed both him and us; and one master is enough, without their being compelled to support so many cousins, relatives, and mistresses."*

Madame de Verneuil could bear no more; but rising passionately from her chair, she left the room without even a parting salutation to the plain-spoken minister, who saw her depart with as much composure as he had seen her enter; and quietly rolling up the obnoxious document which had formed the subject of discussion between them, he in his turn got into his carriage, and proceeded to the Louvre.

Furious alike at her want of success, and at the affront which had been put upon her, the marquise drove from the Arsenal to the hôtel of M. de Soissons; where, still smarting under the rebuff of the uncompromising duke, she did not scruple sufficiently to garble his words to give them all the appearance of a premeditated and wilful insult to the Prince personally. She assured him that in reply to her remark that the

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, pp. 45—50.

relatives of the monarch possessed the greatest claim upon his liberality, M. de Sully had retorted by the observation that the King had too many kinsmen, and that it would be well for the nation could it be delivered from some of them.

This report so exasperated M. de Soissons, that on the following morning he demanded an audience of the sovereign; during which he bitterly inveighed against the arrogance and presumption of the minister, and claimed instant redress for this affront to his honour and his dignity as a prince of the blood; haughtily declaring that should the King refuse to do him justice, he would find means to avenge himself.

The unseemly violence of the count, by offending the self-respect of the monarch, could not have failed, under any circumstances, to defeat its own object; but aware as he was that Sully had sought only the preservation of his personal interests, Henry was even less inclined than he might otherwise have been, to yield to a dictation of this imperious nature. The very excess of his indignation consequently rendered him calm and self-possessed, and thus at once gave him a decided advantage over his excited companion. Instead of retorting angrily, and involving himself in an undignified dispute, he replied to the intemperate language of the count by calmly inquiring if he were to understand that M. de Sully had addressed the obnoxious remark which was the subject of complaint, to the Prince himself; or if it had merely been reported to

him by a third person. To this question M. de Soissons impatiently replied that the insult had not indeed been uttered to himself personally, but that the individual by whom it was communicated to him was above all suspicion; while he moreover considered that his assurance of its truth ought to suffice, as he was incapable of falsehood.

"Were it so, cousin;" said Henry coldly; "you would differ greatly from the other members of your family, especially your elder brother; but since you appear to place so perfect a reliance on the veracity of your informant, you have only to name him to me, and to explain precisely what he alleges to have passed, and I shall then understand what is necessary to be done, and will endeavour to satisfy you as far as I can reasonably do so."

M. de Soissons was not, however, prepared to involve Madame de Verneuil in a quarrel which threatened the most serious results; and he consequently declared that he had plighted his word not to divulge the identity of his informant; a promise which he, moreover, considered to be utterly unnecessary, as he was ready to pledge himself to the entire truth of what he had advanced.

"So, cousin;" said the King with an ambiguous smile; "you screen yourself under the shadow of an oath from revealing to me what I desire to know; then I, in my turn, swear not to believe one syllable of your complaint beyond what M. de Sully may himself report to me; for I hold his truth in as great estimation as you do that of the nameless partisan to

whom you are indebted for the fine story you have inflicted upon me."

It was in somewhat the same frame of mind in which the marquise had quitted the finance minister, that M. de Soissons, as the King rose and thus indicated the termination of the interview, passed from the royal closet; nor did he retire until he had indulged in such unrestrained threats of vengeance, that Henry considered it expedient to dispatch Zamet without delay to the Arsenal to warn Sully to be upon his guard against the impetuous Prince, and not to venture abroad without a sufficient suite; while at the same time the messenger was instructed to inquire if the obnoxious expression had indeed been used, and to whom.

On being apprised of the visit which had been paid by Madame de Verneuil to the duke, the King instantly comprehended the whole intrigue, and at once declared that it was useless to search further; as he well knew that she possessed both malice and invention enough to distort the words of the minister to her own purposes; an admission which indicated for the moment a considerable decrease of infatuation on the part of the royal lover.*

That this had, however, already become evident, was exemplified by the fact that upon some rumour of the kind being addressed to the Duchess de Rohan, coupled

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, pp. 49—53. Dreux de Radier, vol. vi, pp. 90—92. Saint-Edme, pp. 222, 223.

with an inference that the infidelity of Madame de Verneuil had become known to the King, the young duchess had gaily replied: "What could he anticipate? How was it possible for love to nestle between a mouth and chin which are always interfering with each other?"*

It is scarcely doubtful that the present incautious proceeding of the marquise tended to shake the confidence which Henry had hitherto felt in an affection so admirably simulated, that it might have inspired trust in an individual of far inferior rank. He could not overlook the fact that Madame de Verneuil had presumed to declare herself hostile to his favourite minister, and had even made a tool of one of the princes of the blood; an affront to himself which he resented after his accustomed fashion, by withdrawing himself from her society, and assiduously appearing in the private circle of the Queen.

On this occasion, however, week succeeded week, and the monarch still continued to avoid the enraged favourite; and even occasionally alluded to her with a contempt which stung her haughty and presumptuous spirit beyond endurance. She saw her little court melting away, her flatterers dispersing, and her friends becoming estranged; nor could she conceal from herself that if she failed shortly to discover some method of estranging Henry from the Queen, and once more

* Capefigue, vol. viii, p. 130.

asserting her own influence, all her greatness would be scattered to the winds. Her vanity was also as deeply involved as her ambition, for she had hitherto believed her power over the affections of the King to be so entire that he could not liberate himself from her thrall; yet now, in the zenith of her beauty, in the pride of her intellect, and in the very climax of her favour, she found herself suddenly abandoned, as if the effort had not cost a single struggle to her royal lover.

Marie de Medicis, meanwhile, was happy. She cared not to look back upon the past; she sought not to look forward into the future; to her the present was all in all; and she began to encourage bright dreams of domestic bliss, by which she had never before been visited since the first brief month of her marriage. So greatly indeed did her new-born happiness embellish the exulting Queen, that it was at this period that the profligate monarch declared to several of his confidential friends, that had she not been his wife, his greatest desire would have been to possess her as a mistress.* The whole of her little court felt the influence of her delight; she lavished on all sides the most costly gifts; she surrounded the King with amusements of every description; and day after day the heart of the irritated favourite was embittered by the reports which reached her of the unprecedented gaiety and splendour of the Queen's private circle.

* Richelieu, La Mère et le Fils, vol. i, p. 17.

As the dissension which had arisen between Sully and the Count de Soissons rather increased in intensity than yielded to the royal expostulation, Henry resolved to give a public proof of his continued regard for the minister; and for this purpose he caused him to be informed that on his way to Normandy (whither he was about to proceed in order to investigate the truth of certain rumours which had reached him of a meditated insurrection in that province), he would pass by Rosny, and should claim his hospitality for one day with his whole court. As the King was on the eve of his departure, Sully at once left the capital, and by travelling with great speed, he reached the château four days before his expected guests, for whose reception he made the most magnificent preparations of which so brief an interval would admit. As the approaches to the domain were not yet completed, and it was necessary to level the road by which their Majesties would arrive, the duke, in order to accomplish this object, incautiously caused a canal by which it was traversed, and over which the bridge was still unbuilt, to be dammed up; and this arrangement made, he directed his whole attention to the internal decorations of the castle. Unfortunately, however, while his royal and noble guests were still seated at the elaborate and costly banquet which had been prepared for them, a terrific storm burst over the edifice; and information was brought to the host that the waters had become so swollen as to have overflowed their banks, while the pent-up channel which he had

just driven back, had inundated the court, and was pouring itself in a dense volume through the offices. The alarm instantly became general; the Queen, the princesses, and the ladies of the court, sought refuge in the upper rooms of the castle, whither, as the danger momentarily increased, they were soon followed by Henry and his retinue; and meanwhile Sully gave instant orders that workmen should be dispatched to clear the bed of the canal, and thus afford an escape for the invading element. This was happily accomplished without any loss of life; and the accident entailed no further evil consequence than the destruction of all the fruits and confectionary by which the banquet was to have terminated.* After this misadventure the court proceeded to Caen, where at the close of a patient investigation, the King withdrew the government of the city from M. de Crevecœur Montmorency, who was accused of being engaged in a treasonable correspondence with the Duke de Bouillon, the Count d'Auvergne, and the Duke de la Trémouille, his relative, and bestowed it upon M. de Bellefonds.† Hence the royal party removed to Rouen, where Henry succeeded in re-establishing perfect order throughout the whole province of Lower Normandy.

On his return to Paris, the King learnt that M. de Soissons, who had declined to accompany him in his journey, so deeply resented his visit to Rosny, the

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, pp. 54, 55.

† Bernadin Gigault de Bellefonds.

purpose of which he had comprehended upon the instant, that he had resolved in consequence to quit the kingdom. As the voluntary expatriation of the princes of the blood tended alike to weaken his resources and to undermine his authority, Henry at once directed MM. de Bellièvre and de Sillery to wait upon the count, and to assure him that, so soon as he produced certain proof of the culpability of the Duke de Sully, he should receive ample satisfaction for the alleged affront; but that until such proof was furnished he should continue to protect the minister, and to consider him innocent of the offence imputed to him. The chancellor was, moreover, instructed to inquire into the motive which had induced the Prince to declare his intention of leaving France.

To this message M. de Soissons coldly replied by observing that he had been insulted by the duke, to whom he had given no cause of offence; but that as it nevertheless appeared by the statement to which he had just listened, that it was the pleasure of his Majesty to defend the accused rather than the accuser, he considered that he need not advance any further reason for absenting himself from the kingdom. After the departure of MM. de Bellièvre and de Sillery, however, the Prince requested the Duke de Montbazon* and the Count de St. Pol† to wait upon the sovereign, in order to explain

* Hercule de Rohan, Duke de Montbazon.

† François d'Orleans-Longueville, Count de St. Pol, Governor of Picardy.

to him his reason for quitting the country; to assure him of the regret which he felt that recent circumstances had left him no other alternative; and to entreat his Majesty to pardon him if he ventured to take his leave through the medium of these his friends, rather than by appearing in person incur the risk of aggravating his displeasure.

Having seen the two nobles depart upon their mission, M. de Soissons mounted his horse, and at once proceeded to Paris, to make the necessary preparations for the journey which he contemplated; but before he had taken any definitive measures to that effect he was rejoined by his friends, who had been directed by the King to follow him with all speed, and to explain to him that he had altogether mistaken the message intrusted to the chancellor, as the only protection which his Majesty had declared his intention of affording to M. de Sully, was against his own threats of personal violence; while in the second place, they were instructed to inform him that the King strictly enjoined him not to quit Paris, as a want of obedience upon this point would prove very prejudicial to his Majesty's interests; and, finally, they were authorised to assure him that, in the event of his compliance with the royal wishes, he should receive ample satisfaction for the affront of which he complained.

In reply, M. de Soissons maintained that he had given no ground for the apprehensions expressed by the monarch for the safety of his minister; and that he had never entertained any design to injure the interests of

the sovereign; while the knowledge that his withdrawal from the country might have such a tendency, was a more powerful preventive to his departure than "though he had been fettered by a hundred chains;" and that all he required from his adversary was a public acknowledgment of the offence which he had committed against him.

The concession of the irate Prince was followed by a still greater one on the part of the minister; who anxious to relieve the mind of his royal master from the annoyance which he felt at a quarrel in which every noble of the court had taken part, and which threatened to become still more inveterate from day to day, addressed a letter to M. de Soissons, wherein, although he explicitly denied "having uttered the expression which was imputed to him," he overwhelmed the Prince with the most elaborate and hyperbolical assurances of respect and devotion; declaring "that he would rather die than so forget himself."

This submissive letter was accepted as an apology; and a hollow peace between the disputants was thus effected, which restored for a time the tranquillity of the court.

On the 2nd of February, 1604, the Queen was invited to participate in a ceremony which, had she been less happy and hopeful than she chanced to be at that particular period, could not have failed to excite in her breast fresh feelings of irritation and annoyance. This was the reception of Alexandre-Monsieur, the second legitimated son of the monarch and Gabrielle d'Estrées, into the

order of the Knights of Malta. The King having decided that such should be the career of the young Prince, was anxious that he should at once assume the name and habit of the Order; and he accordingly wrote to the Grand Master to request that he would dispatch the necessary patents, which were forwarded without delay, accompanied by the most profuse acknowledgments of that dignitary. In order to increase the solemnity and magnificence of the inauguration, Henry summoned to the capital the Grand Commanders both of France and Champagne, instructing them to bring in their respective trains as many other commanders and knights as could be induced to accompany them; and he selected as the scene of the ceremony the church of the Augustines; an arrangement which was, however, abandoned at the entreaty of the Commander de Villeneuf, the Ambassador of the Order, who deemed it more dignified that it should take place in that of the Temple, which was one of their principal establishments.

At the hour indicated the two sovereigns accordingly drove to the Temple in the same carriage, Alexandre-Monsieur being seated between them; and on alighting at the principal entrance of the edifice, the King delivered the little Prince into the hands of the Grand Prior who was there awaiting him, attended by twelve commanders and twelve knights, by whom he was conducted up the centre aisle. The church was magnificently ornamented; and the altar, which blazed with

gold and jewels, was already surrounded by the Cardinal de Gondy, the Papal Nuncio, and a score of bishops, all attired in their splendid sacerdotal vestments. In the centre of the choir a throne had been erected for their Majesties, covered with cloth of gold; and around the chairs of state were grouped the princes, princesses, and other grandees of the court, including the ambassadors of Spain and Venice, the Connétable-Duke de Montmorency, the Chancellor, the seven presidents of the Parliament, and the knights of the Order of the Holy Ghost.

The *coup d'œil* was one of extraordinary splendour. The whole of the sacred edifice was brilliantly illuminated by the innumerable tapers which lit up the several shrines, and which casting their clear light upon every surrounding object, brought into full relief the dazzling gems and gleaming weapons that glittered on all sides. The organ pealed out its deepest and most impressive harmony; and not a sound was heard throughout the vast building as the Grand Prior, with his train of knights and nobles, led the youthful neophyte to the place assigned to him. The ceremony commenced by the consecration of the sword, and the change of raiment, which typified that about to take place in the duties of the Prince by his entrance into an Order which enjoined alike godliness and virtue. The mantle was withdrawn from his shoulders, and his outer garment removed by the knights who stood immediately around him; after which he was presented alternately with a vest of white satin elaborately embroidered in gold and silver, having

the sleeves enriched with pearls, a waist-belt studded with jewels, a cap of black velvet ornamented with a small white plume and a band of large pearls, and a tunic of black taffeta. In this costume the Prince was conducted to the high altar by the Duke and Duchess de Vendôme, followed by a commander to assist him during the ceremony; and they had no sooner taken their places than Arnaud de Sorbin,* Bishop of Nevers, delivered a short oration eulogistic of the greatness and excellence of the brotherhood of which he was about to become a member. The same prelate then performed a solemn high mass; and when he had terminated the reading of the gospel, Alexandre-Monsieur knelt before him with a taper of white wax in his hand, to solicit admission to the Order. He had no sooner bent his knee than the King rose, descended the steps of the throne, and placed

* Arnaud de Sorbin, Bishop of Nevers, was justly celebrated both for his piety and his learning. He was originally curate of the parish of Ste. Fay, where he had been placed by Georges, Cardinal d'Armagnac, Bishop of Toulouse, who afterwards removed him from that parish, in order to keep him near his person. The Cardinal d'Est, aware of his great worth and extraordinary talents, conferred upon him the rank of doctor of divinity of the cathedral of Auch, the capital of his archbishopric; but he did not retain it long, having been recalled by his first patron to assume the same position in his church at Toulouse, where he was universally loved and respected He was successively lecturer to Charles IX., Henry III. and Henry IV.; and was consecrated, on his elevation to the see of Nevers, by the Cardinal de Gondy, Bishop of Paris. Monseigneur de Sorbin died in Nevers, on the 1st of May, 1606.

himself by his side, saying aloud, that he put off for awhile his sovereign dignity that he might perform his duty as a parent, by pledging himself that when the Prince should have attained his sixteenth year, he should take the vows, and in all things conform himself to the rules of the institution. The procession then passed out of the church in the same order as it had entered; and the young Prince was immediately put into possession of the income arising from his commandery, which was estimated at forty thousand annual livres.*

This ceremony was followed by a series of court festivals, which were abruptly terminated by the arrival of a courier from Lorraine with intelligence of the death of the Duchess de Bar; an event which it was so well known would deeply affect the King, that the principal personages of the court, and the members of his council, determined to go in a body to communicate it, in order that they might offer him the best consolation in their power. This, however, was a grief beyond their sympathy; the affection which Henry bore towards his sister having been unshaken throughout their lives; and the distressing intelligence was no sooner imparted to him than he burst into a passionate flood of tears, and desired that every one should withdraw, and leave him alone with God. He was no sooner obeyed than he caused the windows of his closet to be closed, and admittance refused to all comers; after which he threw

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 152—154.

himself upon his bed, and abandoned himself to all the bitterness of a sorrow alike unexpected and irremediable. Several days passed away in this ungovernable grief; and when its violence at length partially subsided, the King issued an order that the whole court should assume the deepest mourning, and that no one should presume to approach him in any other garb. Not only, therefore, were all the great officers of the crown, and all the court functionaries, from M. le Grand to the pages and lacqueys in the ante-chambers, clad in the same sable livery, but even the foreign ambassadors, anxious alike to avoid giving offence to the monarch, and to escape the inconvenience of being excluded from his presence and thus rendered incapable of furthering the interests of their several sovereigns, adopted a similar habit. The mourning of the Queen and her household more than satisfied all the exigences of the King; for Marie de Medicis not only sympathised deeply in the sufferings of her royal consort, but also felt that in Madame Catherine she had lost a sincere friend—that rarest of all luxuries to a crowned head!—and it was not consequently in her outward apparel alone that she gave testimony of her unfeigned regret, for in abandoning her usual garb, she also abandoned every species of amusement, and forbade all movement in her immediate circle beyond that which was necessitated by the service of her attendants.

There was, however, one exception to this general concession, and that one was consequently so con-

spicuous as to excite instant remark. The Papal Nuncio had exhibited no intention to conform to the universal demonstration which had draped the throne and palaces of France in sables; and the monarch no sooner ascertained the fact than he caused it to be made known to the prelate, that he had no desire to oblige him to assume a garb repugnant to his feelings, but that he requested to be spared his presence until the period of his own mourning was at an end. This announcement greatly embarrassed the Nuncio, who at once felt that, by persisting in the course he had adopted, he should be deprived of the frequent audiences that were essential to the interests of the Sovereign-Pontiff; and, accordingly, he resolved no longer to offer any opposition to the express wishes of the King; but after having written to Rome to explain that he had put on mourning simply to secure himself against the threatened exclusion, and thereby to be enabled to watch over the welfare of the Holy See, he ultimately followed the example of those around him, and demanded permission in his turn to offer his compliment of condolence to the monarch.

This he did, however, in a manner little calculated to reconcile Henry to the reluctance which he had exhibited in performing this duty; for, after having declared his earnest sympathy with the suffering of his Majesty, he went on to remark that those who knew who he was, and for whom he spoke, could not fail to be startled by such an assertion; although he, on his part, could assure

his Majesty of his sincerity, as while others were weeping over the body of Madame, who had died a Protestant and a heretic, his master and himself were mourning for her soul.

To this unexpected exordium the King replied with considerable indignation, that he had more faith in the mercy of God than to believe that a Princess, who had passed her life in the fulfilment of all her social duties, was destined to be condemned from the nature of her creed; and that he himself entertained no doubt of her salvation.* After which he diverted the conversation into another channel, with a tone and manner sufficiently indicative to the Nuncio that he must not presume to recur to so delicate a subject.

The body of Madame was, at the King's desire, conveyed to Vendôme, and deposited beside that of her mother; a dispensation to this effect having been, after many delays, accorded by the Pope; although too late for the duchess to have been made aware, that this, the earnest wish of her heart, had been conceded.

At this period a new cause of uneasiness aroused the sovereign from his private grief. To his extreme surprise he had received intelligence from the Sieur de Barrault† that all the most secret deliberations of his council were forthwith communicated to the King of Spain, without a trace of the source whence this

* Cayet. Chron. Septen., 1604.

† Emeric Gobier, Sieur de Barrault, ambassador at the court of Spain.

important information could be derived; and for a time the mystery defied all the investigations which were bestowed upon it by Henry and his ministers. At length, however, long impunity rendered the culprit daring; and it was ascertained that Philip III. was in possession of copies of the several letters written by the French monarch to the King of England, the Prince of Orange, and other friendly powers, all inimical to Spain; a circumstance which at once rendered it apparent that this treachery must be the work of some official in whom the greatest confidence had hitherto been placed; and steps were forthwith taken to secure the identification of the traitor, which was effected through the agency of another equally unworthy subject of Henry himself. A certain native of Bordeaux, named Jean Leyré (otherwise Rafis), who had been one of the most violent partisans of the League, and who had been banished from France, had entered the Spanish service, and long enjoyed a pension from the sovereign of that country, in recompense of the zeal and ardour with which he rendered every evil office in his power to the kingdom whence he had been cast out.

Circumstances, however, tended to make Leyré less useful to Philip, who had, as we have shown, secured a much more efficient agent, and the ill-acquired pension had accordingly been diminished; while the traitor had no difficulty in perceiving that the favour which he had hitherto experienced from his new master was lessened in the same proportion; a

conviction which determined him to make a vigorous effort to obtain the permission of his offended sovereign to return to France. In order to effect this object, Leyré attached himself to such of his countrymen as were, like himself, domiciliated in Spain; and finally he made the acquaintance of one Jean Blas, who, in a moment of confidence, revealed to him that a secretary of the Count de Rochepot* (the predecessor of M. de Barrault as ambassador at the court of Madrid), who had subsequently returned to the service of the Duke de Villeroy, still maintained a secret correspondence with the Spanish secretaries of state, Don Juan Idiaque Francheséz, and Prada, to whom, in consideration of a pension of twelve hundred crowns of gold, he betrayed all the most important measures of the French cabinet.

This man, whose name was Nicholas l'Hôte, was the son of an old and trusted follower of the Duke de Villeroy, to whose family his own ancestors had been attached for several generations; while he himself was the godson of the Duke, who had obtained for him the honourable office of secretary to M. de Rochepot, when that nobleman accepted the embassy to Spain. On the return of the Count to France, L'Hôte, whose services were no longer necessary to him, was dismissed, and, upon an application to his old patron, was unhesitatingly received into his bureau; where, believing that his

* Antoine de Silly, Damoiseau de Commercy, Count de Rochepot, knight of the Order of the Holy Ghost.

loyalty and devotion to himself were beyond all suspicion, he was employed by M. de Villeroy in decyphering his despatches; an occupation which afforded him ample means of continuing his nefarious correspondence with his Spanish confederates.

Leyré had no sooner obtained this important information, and moreover convinced himself of its probability by various circumstances connected with L'Hôte which he was careful to learn from other sources, than he proceeded to the residence of M. de Barrault, and solicited an interview on business connected with his government. The ambassador, who was still striving by every method in his power to discover the author of the active and harassing treason by which his official measures were perpetually trammelled, with a vague hope that the object of this request might prove to be connected with the mystery which so disagreeably occupied his thoughts, at once granted the required audience; when Leyré, having explained his own position, and expressed the deepest contrition for his past disloyalty, together with his ardent desire to obliterate, by an essential service to his rightful sovereign, a fault which was now irreparable, proceeded to inform M. de Barrault that he was prepared to reveal a system of treachery which was even at that moment in operation to the prejudice of France; but added that, as in communicating this secret he should be compelled immediately to escape from Spain, he would not consent to do so until the ambassador pledged himself that he should

be permitted to return to his own country with a free pardon, and a sufficient pension to secure him against want; and concluded by saying that should it be beyond the power of M. de Barrault to give such a pledge without the royal authority, and that he should consider it necessary to mention him by name, and to state the nature of the promised service to his government, he must entreat him to make this revelation solely to the monarch, and by no means to commit the affair to writing.

To these terms M. de Barrault readily agreed; but after the departure of Leyré, conceiving that the extreme mystery enjoined by that personage was merely intended to enhance the implied value of his revelation; and convinced, moreover, that the sovereign would immediately communicate such a circumstance to his ministers, he addressed himself, as he was in the habit of doing, to the Duke de Villeroy, from whom he shortly afterwards received the required promise of both pardon and pension.

These were, however, no sooner placed in the hands of the astute Leyré, than, perceiving that they bore the counter-signature of Villeroy, instead of that of Lomenie,*

* Antoine de Brienne, de Lomenie, Seigneur de la Ville-aux-Clercs, ambassador-extraordinary to England, in 1595, and secretary of state, was the representative of a distinguished family of Berri, whose father, Marshal de Brienne, registrar of the council, fell a victim to the massacre of St. Batholomew. He himself died in 1628, bequeathing to the Royal Library three hundred and forty manuscript volumes, known as the "Manuscripts of Brienne."

which would have been the case had they been forwarded through the personal medium of the King, he revealed the whole transaction to M. de Barrault; representing that the traitor being under the roof of the minister by whom they had been dispatched, and entirely in his confidence, must already be apprised of his danger, as well as fully prepared to avert it by the destruction of his betrayer; and accordingly he declared that, in order to save his life, he must at once get into the saddle, and endeavour to distance the pursuit which could not fail to be made with a view to seize his person.

This reasoning was so valid that the ambassador not only consented to his immediate departure, but also caused him to be accompanied by his own secretary, M. Descartes, by whom he was to be introduced to the sovereign. The precaution proved salutary, as no later than the following morning legal officers were sent to the house of Leyré, who being unable to find him, forthwith mounted in their turn, and took the road to France. Fortunately for the fugitives they had, however, already travelled a considerable distance; and although hotly pursued, they were enabled to reach Bayonne without impediment, whence they proceeded to Fontainebleau to report their arrival to the King.

Before they reached their destination, they encountered the Duke de Villeroy, who was on his way to his château of Juvisy, and to whom Descartes considered it expedient to declare their errand, without concealing the name of the culprit whom they were

about to accuse. The duke listened incredulously; and when the travellers offered, should it meet with his approbation, to return at once to Paris and arrest his secretary, in order that he might himself deliver him up to the monarch, he declined to profit by the proposal, desiring them to fulfil their mission as the service of the King required; and adding, that he should shortly join them at Fontainebleau, where he was to be met on the morrow by the accused party, when the necessary steps for ascertaining the truth of the statement might be at once taken; but that until he had obtained an audience of the monarch, and ascertained his pleasure, all coercive measures would be premature.

With this unsatisfactory reply Leyré and his companion were fain to content themselves; and having, as they were desired to do, delivered into the hands of the duke the detailed despatch of M. de Barrault with which they had been intrusted, they saw him calmly resume his way to Juvisy, while they continued their route to Fontainebleau.

Early the next day M. de Villeroy in his turn reached the palace, and at once proceeded to the royal closet; where, at the command of the King, he began to read aloud the papers which had been thus obtained; but he had not proceeded beyond the name of the accused when Henry vehemently interrupted him by exclaiming:

"And where is this L'Hôte, your secretary? Have you caused him to be arrested?"

"I think, Sire;" was the reply; "that he is at my hôtel; but he is still at liberty."

"How, Sir!" said the King still more angrily; "you think that he is at your hôtel, and you have not had him seized? This is strange negligence! What have you been about since you were informed of this act of treason, to which you should at once have attended? See to it instantly, and secure the culprit."

The Duke de Villeroy quitted the royal presence in anxious haste, and made his way to the capital with all speed, feeling convinced that should he fail in arresting his delinquent secretary he could not escape the suspicion of the King. L'Hôte had, however, profited by the intervening time to explain his predicament to the Spanish Ambassador, who instantly perceived that not a moment must be lost. Horses were accordingly provided, and the detected traitor, accompanied by the steward of the ambassador, made the best of his way to Meaux, whence they were to travel post to Luxembourg.

Orders had, meanwhile, been dispatched to all the postmasters not to supply horses to any traveller answering the description of L'Hôte; but as he wore a Spanish costume similar to that of his companion he might still have passed undetected, had he not, while endeavouring to mount at Meaux, trembled so violently as to fall from the saddle; a circumstance which attracted the attention of the groom who held his stirrup, and who immediately inferred that he must be some

criminal who was flying from justice. On re-entering the house he related the incident to his master; and upon comparing the height, and bulk, and features of the fugitive with the written detail furnished by the authorities, both parties became convinced that they had suffered the very individual whom they were commissioned to arrest, to pursue his journey to the frontier through their own agency; and thus impressed, the terrified postmaster hastened to the Prévôt des Maréchaux,* who lost no time in following upon his track. The fugitives had, however, changed horses before the anxious functionary and his attendants could arrive to interpose their authority; but despite the darkness of the night, which prevented them from obtaining even a glimpse of those whom they were endeavouring to overtake, they persevered with confidence, being aware that before the close of the second stage, a ferry must be passed, which would necessarily detain the travellers.

The event proved the accuracy of their calculation, the lateness of the hour compelling L'Hôte and his companion to rouse the reluctant ferryman from his rest,

* The Prévôts des Maréchaux were magistrates whose duties consisted in trying vagrants, and persons who could not prove their identity; culprits previously sentenced to corporal punishment, banishment or fine; soldiers, highway robbers, and the members of illicit societies. The Prévôts des Maréchaux took the title of Equerry-Councillors of the King, and their place on the bench of the criminal court was immediately after that of the presiding judge.

a process which involved considerable delay; and they were consequently scarcely midway of the river when they heard the clatter of horses' hoofs upon the bank, and the voice of the maréchal hoarsely shouting to their conductor instantly to return, or he should be hanged for his disobedience.

The fugitives at once felt that they were lost should they permit him to comply; and accordingly the Spaniard drew his sword, threatening to bury it in the heart of the affrighted ferryman should he retreat an inch; while L'Hôte, as craven as he was traitor, could only urge the boat forward by the rope, groaning at intervals: "I am a dead man! I am a dead man!"

On gaining the opposite shore neither of the two attempted to remount; but, abandoning their horses, they set off at their best speed on foot; while the postilion by whom they had been accompanied, had great difficulty, during the return of the boat, in securing the three animals who were thus suddenly committed to his sole charge.

L'Hôte, terrified and bewildered by the voices of the Prévôt and his men, who had, in their turn, passed the ferry, and unable in the darkness to discern any path by which he might secure his escape, parted from his companion, and continued his course along the river-bank; until, attracted by some sallows which he supposed to be an island in the middle of the stream, he threw himself into the water in order to reach it; but soon getting beyond his depth, and being

unable to regain the shore, as well as alarmed by the rapid approach of his pursuers, he perished miserably; and was found on the following morning not twenty yards from the spot where he had abandoned the land.

The Spanish steward, who was captured on the morrow in a hay-loft about two leagues from the river, was conducted to Paris with the corpse, which was consigned to the prison of the Châtelet, where it was publicly exposed during two days, and then drawn upon a hurdle to the place of execution, where it was torn asunder by horses; the quarters of the body being subsequently attached to four wheels which were placed in the principal roads leading to the capital.

The ignominy with which the body was treated, was, as Sully asserts, in accordance with the earnest request of the Duke de Villeroy, who could not disguise from himself the difficulty of his own position; nor was it until after several days' deliberation that Henry, remembering the extent of the confidence placed by the duke in the traitor by whom his interests had been so seriously compromised, could sufficiently control his indignation to assure him that he in no wise suspected him of complicity, but should continue to regard him with the same trust and favour as heretofore. The people were, however, less amenable; nor did they scruple to accuse M. de Villeroy of participation in the crime of his follower. They could not forget that he had been an active member of the League; and they looked with jealousy upon every transaction in which h

was involved; while, fortunately for the duke, the King was ultimately prevailed upon to believe in the sincerity of his regret, and to remember that since he had attached himself to the royal cause, he had rendered essential service to the country; nor did the murmurs of his enemies, who had began to hope that the treason of his secretary must involve his own ruin, induce the monarch to exhibit towards him either distrust or severity; so lenient, indeed, did the King show himself, that after having been detained for a short time in prison, the Spaniard who had been taken with L'Hôte was set at liberty, as too insignificant for trial, and as the mere tool of his master.*

While this affair had monopolised the attention of the King, Madame de Verneuil, enraged by a continual estrangement which threatened the most dangerous results to herself; and resolved at all hazards to recal the attention of the monarch, began to assert more openly and arrogantly than ever her claim upon his hand, and the right of her son to the succession; while at the same time her brother, the Count d'Auvergne, pretexting a quarrel with M. de Soissons, quitted the court, and proceeded to the Low Countries, where he had for some time past been actively engaged in organizing a conspiracy, in support of this extravagant and hopeless pretension.

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 185—193. Matthieu, Hist. des Derniers Troubles, Book II, pp. 435—437. Sully, Mém., vol. v, pp. 109—121. Mezeray, vol. x, pp. 254—257.

The double personage enacted by the marquise was one which necessitated the utmost tact and caution, for she was aware that it involved her liberty, if not her life; and consequently, in order to secure the sympathy of the people, while she was at the same time exciting the passions of those discontented nobles who being remnants of the League still retained an unconquerable jealousy of the power by which they had been prostrated, she affected the deepest and most violent repentance for her past errors; and solicited the permission of the King to retire from France with her children, that she might expiate, by a future of retirement and piety, the faults of which she had been guilty. To this request Henry, without a moment's hesitation, replied by the assurance that she was at perfect liberty to withdraw from the country whenever she saw fit to do so; adding, however, that he would not permit the expatriation of her children; and that before her own departure she must deliver into his hands the written promise of marriage, which, although according to the decision of all the high ecclesiastics of the kingdom totally void and valueless, she had nevertheless been so ill-advised as to render a source of uneasiness and annoyance to the Queen.

This demand was, however, arrogantly rejected; the marquise declaring that she would neither part from her children, nor from a document that rendered her the legal wife of the King; a decision which so incensed Marie de Medicis that she bitterly reproached her royal

consort for an act of weakness by which her whole married life had been embittered; and refused to listen to any compromise until the obnoxious paper should be restored.

Thus circumstanced, Henry at length resolved to exert all his authority; and despairing of success through the medium of a third person, he determined himself to visit the marquise, and to exact its restitution. At this period, however, Madame de Verneuil was too deeply involved in the conspiracy of her brother to prove a willing agent in her own defeat, and she accordingly received the monarch with an unyielding insolence for which he was totally unprepared; violently declaring that the promise had been freely given, and that the birth of her son had rendered it valid. In vain did the King insist upon the absurdity of her pretensions; she only replied by sneering at the extraction of the Queen, and asserting her own equality with a petty Tuscan princess, whose gestures and language were, as she declared, the jest of the whole court. The King, outraged by so gross an impertinence, imperatively commanded her silence upon all that regarded the dignity or pleasure of his royal consort; a display of firmness which more and more exasperated the favourite, who retorted by observing that since the monarch had seen fit to retract a solemn engagement, and thus to brand herself and her children with disgrace, it only remained for her to reiterate her demand for permission to leave the country, with her son and daughter, and her father and brother, both of whom were prepared to share her

fortunes, gloomy as they might be, the fear of God not permitting her to recur to the past without the most profound repentance.

To this persistence Henry coldly answered that in his turn he reiterated his declaration that she was at liberty to retire to England whenever she thought proper to do so, and to place herself under the protection of her kinsman, the Earl of Lennox, but that he would not suffer any other member of her family to share her exile; nor should she herself be permitted to reside either in Spain or the Low Countries, where the treasonable practices of the Count d'Auvergne and the party of the discontented nobles with whom she had recently allied herself, had already given him just cause for displeasure.

Madame de Verneuil, perfectly unabashed by this reproach, assured the King with a smile of haughty defiance, that she could be as firm as himself where her own honour and that of her children was involved; and added that should he persist in demanding the restoration of the written promise by which he had triumphed over her virtue, he might seek it where it was to be obtained, as he should never receive it from her hands; while as regarded her estrangement from himself, it had ceased to be a subject of regret, as since he had become old, he had also become distrustful and suspicious, and his affected favour only tended to render her an object of public jealousy and indignation.

Outraged by this last insult, the King rose angrily from his seat, and without vouchsafing another word to the imperious marquise quitted the room. It was not,

however, in the nature of Henry IV. to find himself once more in the presence of his mistress unmoved; and although the indignity to which he had been subjected throughout the interview just described, should have sufficed to inspire him only with disgust for the woman who had thus emancipated herself from every observance of respect towards his own person, and decency towards the Queen, it is nevertheless certain that his very anger was mingled with admiration; and that not even his sense of what was due to him both as a monarch and as a man could overcome the attraction of Madame de Verneuil. Their temporary separation, during which he had failed to find any equivalent for her wit and vivacity, gave an added charm to every word she uttered; he sighed to see her once more brilliant and happy, devoting her intellect and her fascinations to his amusement; and even while complaining to Sully of her impertinent and uncompromising boldness, he could not forbear uttering a panegyric upon her better qualities, which convinced the minister that their misunderstanding was not destined to be of long duration; an opinion in which he was confirmed when the weak and vacillating Henry, at the close of this enthusiastic apostrophe, proceeded to institute a comparison between the marquise and the Queen, in which the latter suffered on every point. The earnest wish to please of the favourite was contrasted with the coldness of Marie de Medicis; the wit of the one with the haughty superciliousness of the other; in short, the longer that the King discoursed upon the subject, the more perfect became the con-

viction of his listener that the late meeting, tempestuous as it was, had sufficed to restore to Madame de Verneuil at least a portion of her former power.

"I have no society in my wife;" pursued the monarch; "she neither amuses nor interests me. She is harsh and unyielding, alike in manner and in speech; and makes no concession either to my humour or my tastes. When I would fain meet her with warmth, she receives me coldly; and I am glad to escape from her apartments to seek for amusement elsewhere. My poor cousin de Guise is my only refuge; and although she occasionally tells me some home-truths, yet she does it with so much good humour that I cannot take offence, and only laugh at her sallies."*

It was sufficiently evident at that moment that even the "poor cousin" of the monarch, beautiful and accomplished though she was, faded into insignificance before the pampered and presuming favourite.

"Perhaps;" says Sully, with a calm sententiousness better suited to some question of finance; "the Queen had only herself to blame for not having released him from the snares of her rival, and detached him from every other affair of gallantry, as he appeared to me perfectly sincere when he urged me to induce her to conform to *his tastes*, and to *the character of his mind*."

M. de Sully, great as he was in his official capacity,

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, p. 137.

evidently possessed little knowledge of a woman's nature, and the workings of a woman's pride. We have seen what were the "tastes" of Henry IV., and what was the "character of his mind;" and although it would undoubtedly have proved both pleasant and convenient to the harassed minister that Marie de Medicis should have devoured her grief and mortification, and have received the mistresses of the King as the intimates of her circle, it was a result little to be anticipated from a pure-hearted wife, who saw herself the victim of every intriguing beauty whose novelty or notoriety sufficed to attract the dissolute fancy of her consort. Even at the very moment in which M. de Sully records this inferential reproach upon the Queen, he admits that Henry was once more in the thrall of the marquise, and moreover the obsequious friend of Mademoiselle de Guise; and yet he seeks to visit upon Marie the odium of a disunion which can only be, with any fairness, attributed to the King himself; who, even while professing to return to his allegiance as a husband, was openly indulging in a system of licentiousness calculated to degrade him in the eyes of a virtuous and exemplary woman.

That Marie de Medicis had many faults cannot be denied by her most zealous biographer, but that she was outraged both as a wife and as a mother is no less certain; and adopting, as we have a right to do, the conjectural style of M. de Sully. Perhaps—we say in our turn—had the Queen, from the period of her

marriage, been treated with the deference and respect which were her due, the harsher features of her character might have become softened, and the faults which posterity has been compelled to couple with her name, might never have been committed. Assuredly her period of probation was a bitter one; and it may be doubted whether the axe of our own eighth Henry were not after all more merciful in reality, than the wire-drawn and daily-recurring torture to which his namesake of France subjected the haughty and high-spirited woman who was fated to find herself the victim of his vices.

The foreboding of M. de Sully was verified, for within a few days of the interview just recorded between the King and Madame de Verneuil, and during the continuance of his estrangement from his wife, it soon became known that the favourite had re-assumed her empire. In vain did the mortified minister protest against this new weakness, and assure his royal master that it could not fail to increase the anger and indignation of Marie de Medicis; Henry only replied by asserting that when Sully should have succeeded in inducing the Queen to change her humour, and to exert herself to please him, instead of persisting in closeting herself with her foreign followers, and permitting them to criticise his conduct and to aggravate his defects, he would forthwith relinquish his *liaison* with the marquise. Such an answer, however, did not check the zeal of his anxious adviser; who, fearful lest this

last schism should prove more important than those by which it had been preceded, and undeterred even by the impatience with which the King listened to his representations, persisted in assailing him with arguments, remonstrances, and warnings, peculiarly unpalatable at all times, but especially so at the very moment in which he had effected a reconciliation with the favourite that promised a renewal of the entertaining intercourse whence he derived so much gratification.

"You have now, Sire;" resolutely urged the undaunted counsellor; "an admirable opportunity of terminating in a manner worthy of your exalted rank, the difficulty by which you are beset; and of ensuring your own future tranquillity. Assume the authority which appertains to you as a sovereign; compel the Queen to silence; above all, strictly forbid her any longer to indulge in public in those idle murmurs and lamentations by which your dignity suffers so severely in the eyes of your subjects; and visit with the most condign punishment every disrespectful word of which others may be guilty either towards yourself or her. This effort, Sire, will be insignificant beside others which you have made, and in which your personal tranquillity was not involved; be no less courageous in your own cause; and do not suffer your reputation to be tarnished by a weakness incomprehensible in so great and powerful a monarch. By exacting the consideration and obedience which are your due, you are guilty of no tyranny; for it is the

indisputable privilege of every crowned head to enforce both. Let me then entreat of your Majesty, at once to assert yourself, and thus put a period to the domestic differences by which the whole court is convulsed."

"Your advice may be good;" was the evasive reply of the King; "but you do not yet understand me, or you would be aware that I cannot bring myself to exercise severity against persons with whom I am in habits of familiar intercourse, and especially against a woman."

"In that case, Sire;" said Sully; "you have but one alternative. Exile your mistress from the court, and make the required concessions to the Queen."

"I am prepared to do so;" said Henry hastily; "if, in return for this sacrifice on my part, she will pledge herself no longer to annoy me by her jealousy and violence, and to meet me in the same spirit; but I have little hope of such a result: she is perfectly unable to exercise the necessary self-command, and is perpetually mistaking the impulse of temper for that of reason. Her intolerance and rancour forbid all prospect of sincere harmony between us. She is perpetually threatening with her vengeance every woman upon whom I chance to turn my eyes; and even the children of Gabrielle, who were in being before her arrival in the kingdom, are as hateful to her as though she had been personally injured by their birth; nor have I the least reason to anticipate that she will ever overcome so irrational an antipathy. Nor can she be won by kind-

ness and indulgence. Not only have I ever treated her with the respect and deference due to the Queen of a great nation, but even in moments of pecuniary pressure I have been careful, not merely to supply her wants, but also to satisfy her caprices; and that too when I was aware that the sums thus bestowed were to be squandered upon the Italian rabble whose incessant study it has been to poison her mind against both myself and her adopted country. Would to Heaven, Rosny, that I had followed your advice on her arrival, and compelled the mischievous cabal to recross the Alps; but it is now too late for such regrets; and if you can indeed succeed in inducing the Queen to become more amenable to my wishes, and more indulgent to my errors, Ventre Saint-Gris! you will effect a good work, in which I shall be ready to second you. But mark, you must do this apparently upon your own responsibility, and be careful not to let her learn that I have authorised such a measure, or you will only defeat your own purpose, and render her more impracticable than ever."*

Such was the unsatisfactory result of the effort made by the minister to reconcile the royal couple; while, in addition to all his other anxieties, he found himself placed in a position at once so difficult and so dangerous, that he was at a loss how to proceed, until a circumstance fortunately occurred of which he hastened to avail

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, pp. 139—142.

himself. In exchanging the petty court of Florence for that of France, Marie had speedily emancipated herself from the compulsory economy to which she had been accustomed from her childhood, and become reckless in her expenditure to an excess which constantly disturbed the equanimity of the prudent minister of finance. The current expenses of her household amounted annually to the sum of three hundred and forty-five thousand livres, an enormous outlay for that period; while she was so lavish to her favourites, that she was constantly applying for further supplies; and on one occasion, when these were withheld, had actually pawned the crown jewels, which it was necessary to redeem by a disbursement from the public treasury. In addition to these resources, her income was also considerably increased by gratuities, bribes from contracting parties,* and edicts created in her favour; the last of which were peculiarly obnoxious to Sully, from the fact of

* The French term which I have ventured thus freely to translate, is *pot-de-vin*, and literally signifies a sum of money given to a third party who is able to ensure the success of a bargain or negociation, of whatever nature. Thus, for example, in the granting and acceptance of a lease which has been effected by such means, the contracting parties jointly pay down the stipulated amount, irrespective of the value of the lease, for the benefit of the person through whose agency it has been concluded; while so general is the system throughout the country, even to this day, that domestic servants give a *pot-de-vin* to the individual to whom they are indebted for their situation, in which instance, however, the bribe or recompense is also called a *dernier à Dieu*.

their harassing the people without any national benefit; and it was accordingly with great reluctance, and frequently not without expostulation, that he was induced to countersign these documents.

The circumstance to which we have alluded as affording to Sully an opening for the delicate negociation with which he was intrusted by the King, was an offer made to Marie de Medicis of the sum of eighty thousand livres, in the event of her causing an edict to be issued in favour of the officials of the salt-works of Languedoc, which she forthwith dispatched to the minister by M. d'Argouges,* with a request that he would use his influence to obtain it.

Having made himself acquainted with the nature and tendency of the edict, M. de Sully desired the messenger to inform her Majesty that he was of opinion that the sovereign might safely authorise its operation without any injury to the public interests; but added that he feared the moment was an unpropitious one as regarded the Queen herself, the King being still deeply offended by some of her recent proceedings; nor would he advise her to venture upon such an application until she had succeeded in disarming his anger; for which purpose he respectfully suggested that she should endeavour to conciliate her royal consort by some concession, which he would

* Florent d'Argouges, treasurer of the Queen's household. His son was first president of the Parliament of Brittany, and subsequently counsellor of state, and member of the privy council.

exert all his ability to enhance in the eyes of his master; and in every way endeavour to advance her interests as he had already done on several previous occasions.

Marie, eager to possess herself of the large sum thus proffered to her acceptance, consented to follow his advice; and decided upon addressing a letter to the King, expressive of her regret at the coldness which existed between them, and her willingness to meet his wishes, should he condescend to explain them.

This letter, having been read and approved by the finance-minister, was forthwith forwarded from Fontainebleau where Marie de Medicis was then residing, to the King at Paris; but it was not without a struggle that the Queen had compelled herself to such an act of self-abnegation; and her courier was no sooner dispatched than she complained in bitter terms to M. de Sully of the humiliations to which she was subjected by the infatuation of the monarch for Madame de Verneuil; declaring that she could never submit to look with favour or indulgence upon a woman who had the presumption to institute comparisons between herself and her sovereign; who was rearing her children with all the pretensions of princes of the blood royal, and encouraging them in demonstrations of disrespect towards her own person; and who was, moreover, fomenting sedition, by encouraging the discontented nobles to manifestations of disloyalty to their monarch; while the King, blinded by his passion, made no effort to rebuke, or even to restrain, her impertinence.

The minister listened calmly and respectfully to these outpourings of her indignation; but assured her in reply that it only depended upon herself to annihilate the influence of the favourite, by a system of consideration for the feelings of her royal consort, of which she had not hitherto condescended to test the efficacy. He, moreover, implored her to make the trial; and represented so forcibly the benefit which must accrue to herself by a restoration of domestic peace, that she at length admitted the justice of his arguments, and pledged herself to accelerate, by every means in her power, a full and perfect reconciliation.

Gratified by this almost unhoped-for success, Sully shortly afterwards withdrew; and the reply of the King to the letter which she had addressed to him was delivered to Marie when she was surrounded only by her own private circle. It was at once courteous and conciliatory; and it is probable, that had it arrived before the departure of the duke, it would have been acknowledged in the same spirit; but, unfortunately, the Queen had no sooner communicated its contents to her confidential friends, than she was met by the assurance that the monarch had, on the receipt of her missive, carried it to the marquise, where her credulity had excited great amusement; an assertion which was followed by other commentaries so distasteful to her pride, that, instead of persevering in the prudent course which she had been induced to adopt, she haughtily informed the royal courier by whom it had been brought

that she should intrust him with no written reply, but should expect his Majesty on the following day according to his own appointment.

This marked and impolitic demonstration of disrespect excited anew the resentment of Henry, who openly expressed his indignation in the most unmeasured terms, and that so publicly, that within a few hours Marie was informed of every particular; and the breach which Sully had fondly flattered himself that he was about to heal, became wider and more threatening than ever.*

Meanwhile the commerce of the King and the favourite was far from affording to the former all the gratification which he had anticipated from its renewal. The coquetry—to designate it by no harsher term—of Madame de Verneuil, irritated the jealousy of the monarch, who could not forget that she had taunted him with his advancing age, and who saw her unblushingly encourage the admiration and attention of such of the courtiers as she could induce to brave his displeasure; while her lavish expenditure and unceasing demands, alike upon his patience and his purse, involved him in perpetual difficulties with his finance-minister, which her extravagant attempts to assume the airs, and to usurp the privileges of *quasi*-royalty, did not tend to diminish.

The French King was, in fact, at this period, the victim of his own vices; the sovereign of a great and powerful

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, pp. 144—146.

nation, without a home or a hearth, a wifeless husband, and a discontented lover; tenderly attached to all his children, without being able to confer a favour upon the offspring of one mother, without incurring the resentment of the other; and while feeling himself degraded by the thrall in which he lived, totally devoid of the moral courage necessary to his escape from so disgraceful a bondage.

It is in moments such as these that virtue and honour assert their well-earned privileges without even the effort of enforcing them. Weary of his perpetual discomfort, harassed by the heartless conduct of his mistress, and pining for the mental repose which he so greatly needed, Henry once more turned towards his wife as his only probable and legitimate haven of rest; but, hopeless of success through his own agency, he again addressed himself to Sully for assistance and support.

Suddenly summoned by the monarch, the minister presented himself at the Tuileries, where he found him in the orangery, in which he had taken refuge from a shower of rain, pale, agitated, and anxious. The subject of his reconciliation with the Queen was mooted on the instant, and he repeatedly called upon Sully for his advice as to the best and surest method of effecting it. Conscious that his counsels had hitherto been either disregarded, or rendered abortive by the King himself, the duke endeavoured to escape this new demand upon his patience, but Henry was peremptory.

"Since then you command me to speak, Sire;" he said at length; "I will be frank. In order to accomplish the object which you have in view, you can only pursue one course. Put the sea between yourself and four or five individuals by whom you are now beset, and cause as many others to pass the Alps."

"Your first suggestion is practicable;" was the reply: "there is nothing to prevent me from banishing the malcontents who are conspiring in my very court, but I am differently situated with regard to the Italians; for, in addition to the hatred which I should draw down upon myself from a nation proverbially vindictive, the Queen would never forgive an affront offered to her favourites. In order to free myself from these, she must be induced herself to propose their return to their own country, and I know no one more likely than you, Rosny, to effect an object at once so desirable and so important. Make the attempt therefore; and should you succeed, I pledge myself from that moment to abstain from every intrigue of gallantry. Reflect upon what I have suggested in my turn; and consider the means by which this may be accomplished with the least possible delay."

So saying, the King, after ascertaining that the weather had again cleared, abruptly quitted the orangery, leaving M. de Sully perfectly aghast at the new duty which had thus been suddenly thrust upon him.

As it was utterly impossible to propose such a measure to Marie de Medicis as that of dismissing her most

favoured attendants until a perfect reconciliation had been effected between the royal couple, it was to that object that the prudent minister first turned his attention; and so successful did he ultimately prove, that after a brief correspondence, the King and Queen had an interview, during which the whole of their recent misunderstanding was calmly discussed, and declared by both parties to have been occasioned by the ill-judged interference of those by whom they were severally surrounded; nor did they separate until they had mutually pledged themselves to consign the past to oblivion, and thenceforward to close their ears against all the gossiping of the court.

The effect produced by this matrimonial truce (for it was unfortunately nothing more, and lasted only for the short space of three weeks) was of the most happy description. Nothing was seen or heard of save projects of amusement, which, not content with absorbing the present, extended also into the future. This calm, like those by which it had been preceded, was not, however, fated to realise the hopes of either party. Henry was too much addicted to pleasure to fulfil his part of the compact; while the Queen had, unhappily for her own peace, so long accustomed herself to listen to the comments and complaints of her favourites, that it was not long ere they found her as well disposed as she had previously been, to lend a willing ear to their communications. In Madame de Verneuil they, of course, possessed a fruitful topic; and as Marie, despite all her

good resolutions, could not restrain her curiosity with regard to the proceedings of this obnoxious personage, she ere long betrayed her knowledge of the new affronts to which she had been subjected by the marquise.

The result of this unfortunate enlightenment was such as, from her impulsive character, might justly have been anticipated. She no sooner found herself in the society of the King than she once more assailed him with invectives and reproaches which he was of no temper to brook; and in this new dilemma Sully resolved, as a last and crowning effort to establish peace, to suggest to Marie, that as her happiness had again been destroyed solely by the evil tongues about her, she should secure to herself the gratitude and affection of her royal consort by dismissing all her Italian household, and surrounding herself entirely by French friends and attendants.

The indignation of the Queen at this proposal was beyond the reach of all argument. She declared herself to be sufficiently unhappy separated from her family, and neglected by her husband, without driving from her presence, almost with ignominy, the few persons who still remained faithful to her interests, and who sincerely sympathised in her sufferings; and although the duke ventured again and again to recur to the subject, and always with the same earnestness, Marie continued to reject his counsel as steadily as when it was first offered.*

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, pp. 147—149.

The new attachment, felt or feigned by the King for Mademoiselle de la Bourdaisière, had again awakened her jealousy; and she complained with equal reason that Henry, even while indulging in this new passion, made no attempt to restrain the arrogance and bitterness of the forsaken favourite. Nor was Madame de Verneuil less indignant than the Queen; for even while affecting an extreme devotion, and surrounding herself with ecclesiastics, who not content with labouring to effect her salvation, were also feeding her vanity with the most fulsome panegyrics, she could ill brook to see herself so easily forgotten; and once more she indulged in such indecent liberties with the name of Marie de Medicis, that the King, whose patience was the more easily exhausted from the fact that he believed himself to be at last independent of her fascinations, was again driven to resort to the assistance of M. de Sully, in order to compel the restoration of the written promise of marriage which he had been weak enough to place in her hands.

It was, indeed, impossible for the sovereign of a great nation longer to temporise with an insolence which at this period had exceeded all endurable limits; for not only did the marquise assert, as she had previously done, the illegality of the King's union with his wife, but so thoroughly had her affected devotion wrought upon the minds of the priests about her, that several among them were induced to support her pretended claim, and even publicly to declare the bans of marriage between

herself and the monarch.* Among these, two capucins, Father Hilaire of Grenoble, and Father Archange, her confessors, the last in France, and the first in Rome, attached themselves recklessly to her interests,† while at the same time numerous letters and pamphlets were distributed in the capital, advocating her cause ;‡ and so dangerously active had the cabal become in the Eternal City that the Cardinal d'Ossat considered it expedient to address a letter to the French Government upon the subject, which implicated in this wild conspiracy both

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, p. 155.

† Saint-Edme, vol. ii, p. 223.

‡ In order to convey some idea of the effect produced by the ostensible devotion of Madame de Verneuil upon those who gave her credit for sincerity, we need only quote a passage in the dedication of d'Hemery d'Amboise to his translation of the works of Gregory de Tours, in which, addressing himself to the marquise, he gravely says: "that she had deduced from the inspired writings of the fathers their salutary doctrine; and that she practised it so faithfully, that her firmness had triumphed over her adversities, and her merit exceeded her happiness." "Your life," he adds, with the same unblushing sycophancy; "serves as a mirror for the most pious, and compels the admiration of all who see so holy and resolute a determination exerted at an age that has scarcely attained its prime; and at which, despising mere personal beauty, and the other precious advantages with which you have been richly endowed by Heaven, you have devoted the course of your best years to the contemplation of the marvels of God, joining spiritual meditation to good works." —*Dreux du Radier*, vol. vi, pp. 94, 95.

the King of Spain and the Duke of Savoy; who, through the agency of Father Hilaire, were represented as upholding the pretensions of Madame de Verneuil. These circumstances, and especially the notoriety of a fact which involved alike the dignity of her husband, and her own honour, so greatly exasperated the temper of the Queen, that she no longer attempted to control her irritation; and on one occasion when, as was constantly the case, the pretended claim of the marquise became the subject of discord between the royal couple, Marie so thoroughly forgot the respect which she owed to the King, that she raised her hand to strike him. Fortunately, however, for both parties, the Duke de Sully, who was present during the altercation, and who instantly detected her intention, sprang forward and seized her arm; but in his haste he was compelled to do this so roughly that she afterwards declared he had given her a blow, adding, however, that she was grateful to him for having thus preserved her from a worse evil.

So great, indeed, was her sense of the obligation thus conferred, that thenceforward Marie regarded the finance-minister with more favour than she had hitherto done; and occasionally requested his advice during her misunderstandings with the King. She could not have chosen a safer counsellor, for although Sully does not, in any instance, attempt to disguise his dislike to the Tuscan princess, he was incapable of betraying so sacred a trust; and if, as generally occurs in such cases, his

advice was frequently neglected, she never once had cause to question its propriety.

A short time subsequent to the scene we have just described the Queen sent to request the presence of the minister in her closet, where he found her conversing with Concini, and evidently much excited. On his entrance, she informed him that she was weary of the infidelities of the monarch; that the jealousy which he constantly kept alive, alike undermined her health, and destroyed her happiness; and that she had determined to follow the advice of her faithful servant, there present, and to communicate to his Majesty certain advances which had been made to her by some of the court nobles, who were less insensible to her attractions than the King himself.

This communication startled M. de Sully; and while he was endeavouring to frame a reply by which he might remain uncompromised, Concini with his usual presumption followed up the declaration of the Queen, by asserting his own conviction that it was the wisest measure which she could adopt; as it would at once convince her royal consort that she desired to keep nothing secret from him in which he was personally interested.

This interruption afforded time for the duke to collect his thoughts; and heedless of the interference of the Italian, he remarked in his turn that her Majesty must pardon him if he declined to offer any opinion on so delicate a question, as it was one entirely beyond his province; after which, resolutely changing the tone of

the discourse, he continued to converse with the Queen upon indifferent topics until Concini had retired. Then, however, he voluntarily reverted to the subject which she had herself mooted, and implored her to abandon her design; assuring her that he had her interest too sincerely at heart to see her without anxiety about to place herself in a position at once false and dangerous; as such an assurance from her own lips could not fail to excite in the breast of the King the greatest and most legitimate suspicions; for every man of sense must at once feel that no individual, be his rank what it might, would have dared to declare his passion to a person of her exalted condition, without having previously ascertained that its expression would be agreeable to her, and having been tacitly encouraged to do so; while, on the other hand, so far from discovering any merit in such an avowal, or regarding it as a proof of confidence, his Majesty would immediately decide that the motive by which she had been actuated in making it, must have been either the fear of discovery, or a desire to rid herself of persons of whom she had become weary, in order that she might be left at liberty to encourage new suitors; or, finally, that she had been urged to this unheard-of measure, by individuals who had obtained sufficient influence over her mind to induce her to sacrifice her peace and her honour to their own views.*

Happily for herself, Marie de Medicis admitted the

* Richelieu, Hist. de la Mère et du Fils, vol. i, pp. 8—11.

validity of these arguments, and abandoned her ill-advised intention; and she was the more readily induced to do this from the assurance which she received from M. de Sully that the restoration of the promise given to Madame de Verneuil by the King was about to be enforced, and that she would consequently be speedily relieved from the anxiety by which she had been so long tormented. Nor was the pledge an idle one, as immediate measures were adopted to effect this act of justice towards the Queen. The negociation was renewed by two autograph letters from the King himself, addressed respectively to the Count d'Entragues, and the Marquise de Verneuil, which were long preserved in the library of Joly de Fleury, but are now supposed to be lost. Copies of both had been, however, fortunately taken by the Abbé de l'Ecluse,* and as they are highly characteristic of the monarch, and cannot fail to prove interesting to the reader, we shall insert them at length.

To M. d'Entragues the King wrote as follows:

" M. d'Entragues, je vous envoye ce porteur pour me rapporter la promesse que je vous baillay a Malesherbes je vous prys ne faillir de me la renvoyer et si vous voulez me la rapporter vous mesme je vous diray les raisons qui m'y poussent qui sont domestiques et non d'estat par lesquelles vous direz que jay raison et reconnaitrez que vous avez été trompé, et que jay un

* MSS. Dupuy, vol. 407.

naturel plutost trop bon que autrement, massurant que vous obeyrez à mon commandement, je finirai vous assurant que je suis votre bon mestre."

The letter addressed to Madame de Verneuil bears the same date, and runs thus:

"Mademoiselle, lamour, lhonneur et les bienfaits que vous avez reçus de moi, eussent arrêté la plus legere ame du monde si elle n'eut point été accompagnée d'un mauvais naturel comme le vostre. Je ne vous picqueray davantage bien que je le peusse et dusse fair, vous le savez: je vous prie de me renvoyer la promesse que savez et ne me donnez point la peine de la revoir par autre voye: renvoyez moi aussi la bague que je vous rendis l'autre jour: voilà le sujet de cette lettre, de laquelle je veux avoir reponse à minuit."

These specimens of royal eloquence were unavailing: evasive answers were returned by the King's messenger; and entreaties having proved ineffectual, threats were subsequently substituted; upon which the arrogant marquise was ultimately induced to relinquish her claim to ascend the throne of France, on condition that she should at the moment of delivering up the document, receive in exchange the sum of twenty thousand silver crowns, and the promise of a marshal's *bâton* for her father the Count d'Entragues, who had never been upon a field of battle. This condition, onerous as it appears, was accepted; and the father of the lady finally, but with evident reluctance, restored the pernicious document to the King in the presence of the Count de Soissons and

the Duke de Montpensier, MM. de Bellièvre, de Sillery, de Maisse,* de Jeannin, de Gêvres,† and de Villeroy, by whom it was verified; and who signed a declaration to this effect,‡ although it was afterwards proved,§ that d'Entragues had only delivered into the hands of Henry a well-executed copy of the paper, while he himself retained the original.

This ceremony over, the marquise was commanded to

* André Hurault, Seigneur de Maisse, had been ambassador to Venice under both Henry III. and Henry IV.; and, in his official capacity, had frequent disputes with the nuncios of Sixtus V. and Clement VIII., in consequence of which those prelates exerted all their influence to injure his interests at the court of Rome. André Morosin mentions M. de Maisse as an able and far-sighted man, *saguci admodum ingenio*. In 1595, Henry IV. again sent him to Venice to offer his thanks to the Senate for the extaordinary embassy which they had forwarded to him during the previous year; and as M. de Maisse travelled on this occasion with the Cardinal Duperron, who was instructed to pass by that city on his way to Rome, great alarm was created in the mind of the Pope that the French ambassador was about to visit the papal court in his company; an event which he deprecated, from the distrust which he felt of the designs of an individual who had already frustrated the measures of his accredited agents. His Holiness was, however, *quitte pour la peur*, the instructions of M. de Maisse having restricted him to his Venetian mission.

† Louis Potier de Gêvres, secretary of state. It is from him that the branch of his family still bearing the name of Gêvres is descended, while that of Novion owes its origin to his elder brother, Nicolas Potier de Blancmenil.

‡ Mezeray, vol. x, p. 261.

§ Le Laboureur sur Castelnau.

leave the court, and for a short time peace was perfectly restored. The King had already become weary of his new conquest, and the hand of Mademoiselle de la Bourdaisière was bestowed upon a needy and complaisant courtier; but still the absence of the brilliant favourite, despite all her insolence, left a void in the existence of Henry which no legitimate affection sufficed to fill; and it was consequently not long ere he became enamoured of Mademoiselle de Bueil,* a young beauty who had recently appeared at court in the suite of the Princess de Condé. The extraordinary loveliness of the youthful orphan at once riveted the attention of the King, and her own inexperience made her, in so licentious a court as that of Henry IV., an easy victim; so easy, indeed, that the libertine monarch did not even affect towards her the same consideration which he had shown to his former favourites; although her extraordinary personal perfections sufficed to render her society at this period indispensable to him.

It was not long ere the exiled favourite was apprised of this new infidelity, yet such was her reliance upon her own power over the passions of the King that she affected to treat it with contempt; but although

* Jacqueline de Bueil, subsequently Countess de Moret, was the daughter of Claude de Bueil, Seigneur de Courcillon and La Machère, and of Catherine de Monteclu, who both died in 1596. The family of Bueil traced their descent from Jaen, the first of the name, Sieur de Bueil in Touraine, who was equerry of honour to Charles-le-Bel, in 1321.

she scorned to admit that she could feel any dread of being supplanted by a rival, after-events tended to prove that she was by no means so indifferent to the circumstance as she endeavoured to appear; and being as vindictive in her hate as she was unmeasured in her ambition, she could not forgive the double insult which had been offered to her pride. Forgetting the excesses of which she had been guilty, and the forbearance of the King, not only towards her faults, but even towards her vices, she determined on revenge, and unhappily she felt that the means were within her reach.

The Count d'Auvergne, although he had been a second time pardoned by Henry, who was ever too ready to receive him into favour, and was wont to declare that although he was a *prodigal son*, he could never make up his mind to see the offspring of his King and brother-in-law perish upon a scaffold,* was devotedly attached to his sister, and of an intriguing spirit which delighted in every species of cabal and conspiracy; while François de Balsac d'Entragues, her father, overlooking the fact that he had himself become the husband of a woman whose reputation was lost before their marriage, talked loudly of the dishonour which the King had brought upon his family; and moreover resented, with great reason, an attempt made by Henry to seduce his younger daughter, Marie de Balsac.

* Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, p. 97.

For this lady, who subsequently became the mistress of Bassompierre, the King conceived so violent a passion, that although at that period in his fiftieth year, he did not hesitate to assume the disguise of a peasant, in order to meet her in the forest of Verneuil. The appointment had, however, become known to M. d'Entragues, who, exasperated by this second affront, and indignant at the persevering licentiousness of the monarch, stationed himself with fifteen devoted adherents in different quarters of the wood, in order to take his life. Happily for Henry, he was well mounted; and on being attacked, defended himself so resolutely that he escaped almost by a miracle.

The disappointment of M. d'Entragues at this failure was so great that he compelled his daughter to propose another meeting in a solitary spot which he indicated, and where he made every preparation to secure the assassination of the imprudent monarch; but although she dispatched the letter containing the assignation, Marie de Balsac found means to apprise her royal lover of the reception which awaited him; and he consequently failed to keep the appointment.* That the Count d'Entragues, twice foiled in his meditated vengeance, should lend himself willingly to any conspiracy against the honour and life of his sovereign, is consequently scarcely surprising, when we remember how many nobles had in turn caballed against Henry IV.

* Wraxall, vol. v, pp. 356, 357.

with scarcely a pretext for their disloyalty; and meanwhile Madame de Verneuil, fully conscious of the hatred of Philip of Spain for the French king, had no sooner resolved upon revenge than she at once turned her attention towards that monarch, and by exciting his worst passions, succeeded in securing his support. She found an able and zealous coadjutor in Don Balthazar de Zuniga, the Spanish ambassador at the court of France: while her step-brother, the Count d'Auvergne, was no less successful with the Duke of Savoy, who, like Philip III., was never more happy than when he discovered and profited by an opportunity of harassing the French sovereign.

This conspiracy, as absurd as it was criminal, was, moreover, supported by many of the discontented nobles, who had never pardoned Henry for the suppression of the League; and, wild as such a project cannot fail to appear in these days, we have the authority of Amelot de la Houssaye* for the fact that the Count d'Auvergne had induced Philip by a secret treaty to promise his assistance in placing Henry de

* Abraham-Nicolas Amelot de la Houssaye was born at Orleans, in the year 1634; and passed nearly all his life in composing works of history, and in translating the historians by whom he had been preceded. His principal productions are "A History of the Government of Venice;" "Historical, Political, Critical, and Literary Memoirs;" and translations of the "History of the Council of Trent," by Fra Paolo; of the "Prince," by Machiavelli; and of the "Annals of Tacitus." He died in 1706.

Bourbon, the son of Henry IV. and Madame de Verneuil, on the throne of France, to the detriment of the legitimate offspring of Marie de Medicis.

In the act by which Philip bound himself thus to recognise the pretended claim of the marquise, he also gave a pledge to furnish her with five hundred thousand livres in money, and to dispatch the Spanish troops which at that moment occupied Catalonia, to support the disaffected French subjects who might be induced to join the cabal in Guienne and Languedoc.

Report also said that M. d'Auvergne, not satisfied by this attempt to undermine the throne of Henry IV., had formed a design against his life; but the rumour obtained no credit even from his enemies.*

Whatever extenuation may be found for Madame de Verneuil in such an attempt as this; whatever indulgence may be conceded to a woman baffled in her ambition, misled by her confidence in a supposititious claim, and urged on by a blind and uncalculating affection for her children, it is difficult to find any excuse for the persevering ingratitude of her step-brother. As regards M. d'Entragues, we have already shown that he had more than sufficient cause for seeking revenge upon a monarch who sacrificed every important consideration to the passion of the moment; but the Count d'Auvergne had experienced nothing save indulgence from Henry; and it was consequently

* Mezeray, vol. x, pp. 261, 262.

in cold blood that he organised a conspiracy, which, had it succeeded, must have plunged the whole nation into civil war. He was, moreover, the more culpable that he had, in order to secure a pardon for his previous participation in the crime of Biron, assured the too-credulous monarch, that in the event of his restoration to favour, he would, if permitted to continue his intercourse with Philip of Spain as unrestrictedly as heretofore, profit by the facility thus afforded to him to reveal to his Majesty all the secrets of the Spanish government.

There can be no doubt that such a proposal must have startled, and even disgusted the frank nature of the French king; but it was nevertheless too tempting to be rejected; and he himself avowed to Sully, when the new conspiracy of d'Auvergne became known to him, that it was less to the prayers of his sister, and his own consideration for the children whom she had borne to him, than in the hope that he might, through the medium of the count, be enabled to contravene the measures of his most subtle and dangerous enemy, that he had been induced on that occasion to pardon his disloyalty.*

By this unwise and ill-calculated concession, the King had afforded an opportunity to the restless and disaffected noble of pursuing a correspondence with Philip as dangerous as it was convenient. Couriers were permitted to come and go unquestioned; and

* Sully, Mém., vol. iv, p. 125.

it was not long ere every measure of the French cabinet was as intimately known at Madrid as it was in the privy council of Henry himself. This evil was, moreover, increased by the unconditional pardon which had enabled M. d'Auvergne, after his strange and degrading offer, to return to the court; and he profited so eagerly by the opportunity which was thus afforded to him, that he had little difficulty in convincing the false and vindictive Philip that the moment was at length come in which he might overthrow the power of the sovereign whom he hated.

M. de Lomenic, however, who unaware of the promise made by the count to Henry, became uneasy at the constant communication which the former maintained with the court of Spain, at length determined to satisfy himself as to its nature; and for this purpose he intercepted some letters, by which he instantly became convinced of the treason meditated against his royal master. Indignant at the discovery which supervened, he suffered his displeasure to reach the ears of the culprit, who forthwith quitted the capital, and hastened to secure himself from arrest in Auvergne, of which province he was the governor; and where he made instant preparations to leave the kingdom, should such a step become necessary.

It was consequently in vain that the King, when informed of the circumstance, dispatched the Sieur d'Escures* to summon the count to his presence in

* Pierre Fougeu, Sieur d'Escures.

order that he might justify himself. D'Auvergne resolutely refused to quit his retreat until he had received a formal promise from the sovereign that he should be absolved from all blame of whatever description, and received by his Majesty with his accustomed favour; alleging as a pretext for making this demand, that he was on bad terms with all the princes of the blood, with the grand equerry, and even with his sister Madame de Verneuil; and that he could not make head against such a host of enemies except he were supported by the King.

The expostulations of the royal messenger were fruitless; the count being more fully alive to the danger of his position than M. d'Escures himself; and to every argument and denegation of the anxious envoy he consequently replied by saying that it was useless to urge him to compromise his safety while he felt certain that his ruin had been decided; a fact of which he was convinced from the circumstance of his having received no letter from any of the intimate friends of the King since he had withdrawn from the court; while he was sufficiently acquainted with the bad disposition of Madame de Verneuil, to be assured that in the event of her being enabled to effect a reconciliation with the monarch at his expense, she would not scruple to sacrifice his interests to her own.

The embassy of M. d'Escures thus signally failed; and instead of furthering the purpose for which it was

intended, it produced a totally opposite effect; as, warned by this attempt to regain possession of his person, it induced M. d'Auvergne to adopt the most extraordinary precautions. He from that moment not only refused to enter any town or village where he might be surprised, but he also declined to hold any intercourse even with his most familiar friends save on a highway, or in some plain or forest where the means of escape were easy; and when hunting, a sport to which he was passionately attached, and which was at that period the only relaxation he could enjoy with safety, he caused videttes to be stationed upon the surrounding heights, who were instructed to apprise him by a concerted signal of the approach of strangers.*

All his caution was, however, vain; his capture being an object of too much importance to the King, at the present conjuncture, to be readily relinquished; and accordingly it was at length effected by a stratagem. By the advice of the Duke de Sully, this enterprise was intrusted to M. Murat,† who associated with himself M. de Nérestan ‡ and the Viscount de Pont-Chateau,

* Daniel, vol. vii, pp. 453, 454.

† Treasurer of the war department, and lieutenant-general at Riom.

‡ Philibert de Nérestan, knight of Malta, and captain of the body-guard of Henry IV., was as celebrated for his admirable qualities of mind and heart as for the antiquity of his birth. He was grand master of the Orders of St. Lazarus and Nôtre-Dame de Carmel, the latter of which was instituted by the sovereign at his intercession.

who by his instructions, paid several visits to the count at his château of Borderon near Clermont, without, however, inducing him to quit its walls.

These gentlemen, nevertheless, made themselves so agreeable to the self-exiled conspirator, and listened so patiently to his complaints, that their society became at last necessary to him; and so thoroughly did they succeed in gaining his confidence, that they finally experienced little difficulty in persuading him to be present at a review of the light cavalry of the Duke de Vendôme, of which he was the colonel-general, and which was about to take place in a little plain between Clermont and Nonant. He accordingly proceeded to the spot with only two attendants; and he was no sooner seen approaching, than M. de Nérestan and the Viscount de Pont-Chateau advanced from the ranks, apparently to welcome him; but on reaching his side the latter seized the bridle of his horse, while his companion arrested him in the name of the King.* Resistance was of course impossible; and thus the Count d'Auvergne, despite all his precautions, found himself a prisoner.

L'Etoile,† with a *naïveté* well calculated to provoke a smile of pity, calls this a "brave" and subtle stratagem: on its subtlety we may be silent, but we leave alike its courage and its honesty to the judgment of our readers.

* Matthieu, Hist. des Derniers Troubles, Book II, p. 438. Péréfixe, vol. ii, pp. 406, 407.

† L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 242.

Sully admits* that not only the two captors, but even Murat himself, who had an ancient grudge against d'Auvergne, spared no pains or deceit to insinuate themselves into his confidence; while it is equally certain that it was to his perfect faith in their professions that he owed his capture.

Having secured their prisoner, M. Murat and his coadjutors caused him to deliver up his sword, and to exchange the powerful charger upon which he was mounted, for a road-hack that had been prepared for him, upon which he proceeded under a strong guard to Briare, whence he was conducted in a carriage to Montargis; and, finally, conveyed in a boat to Paris. During this enforced journey his gaiety never deserted him; nor did he appear to entertain the slightest apprehension as to the result of his imprisonment; throughout the whole of the way he jested, drank and laughed, as though his return to the capital had been voluntary; and when he was finally met at the gates of the city by M. de la Chevalerie, the lieutenant-governor of the Bastille, he was in such exuberant spirits that the astounded official deemed it expedient to remind him that they had not come together to dance a ballet, but for a totally different purpose.†

It was only when he found himself conducted to the very chamber which had been occupied by the Maréchal de Biron previous to his execution, that a shade of

* Mémoires, vol. v, p. 185.

† L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 243.

anguish passed over the features of the count. He could not but remember that the traitor-duke, who had rendered great and good service to his sovereign, had suffered for the same crime of which he was in his turn accused without any such plea for mercy; and it is therefore scarcely surprising that he should have been startled upon finding himself installed as the successor of the condemned marshal.

M. d'Auvergne was not, however, of a temperament long to yield to gloomy ideas; and consequently, while his unhappy wife* was lost in tears, and endeavouring by every exertion in her power to save him from a fate which appeared inevitable, he availed himself to the utmost of the leniency of his jailors, and indulged in every luxury and amusement which he was enabled to command. Agonised by her apprehensions, the unhappy countess at length resolved to throw herself at the feet of the King; where, with a humility which contrasted strangely with the unbending arrogance of her sister-in-law, Madame de Verneuil, she besought in the most touching terms that Henry would spare the life of her husband, and once more pardon his crime. Her earnest supplications evidently affected the King; while Marie de Medicis, who was present, wept with the heart-broken wife, and warmly seconded her petition; but the monarch, who probably feared the result of such an act of mercy, having raised her from her knees with a gentle kindness

* Charlotte, eldest daughter of Henry, Duke de Montmorency, High Constable of France.

which made her tears flow afresh, led her to the side of the Queen upon whose arm he placed his hand as he said firmly: "Deeply, Madam, do I pity you, and sympathise in your suffering; but were I to grant what you ask, I must necessarily admit my wife to be impure, my son a bastard, and my kingdom the prey of my enemies."

All, therefore, that the countess could obtain was the royal permission to communicate with her husband, a concession of which she hastened to take advantage; when, in reply to her anxious inquiry as to what he desired of her, she received by her messenger the heartless reply that she might send him a good stock of cheese and mustard, and that she need not trouble herself about anything else.*

The intercepted letters of the Count d'Auvergne having also implicated his step-father M. d'Entragues, and his sister Madame de Verneuil, both were subsequently arrested; the former by the Provost Defunctis† in his castle of Marcoussis; and the latter at her residence in the Faubourg St. Germain; while her children were taken from her, and sent, under a proper escort, to the palace of St. Germain-en-Laye. So important did it, moreover, appear to the French ministers to ascertain the exact extent of the conspiracy, that the provost was accompanied to Marcoussis by M. de Lomenie, in order that a search might be instituted upon the premises;

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 247—249.

† Jean Defunctis, lieutenant criminal of the Provost of Paris. —*Hist. Chro. de la Chancell. de France*, p. 316.

the result of which tended to prove, beyond all possibility of doubt, that the original engagement delivered by the father of the marquise to the sovereign, had, in fact, not been restored, but had been skilfully copied by some able pen; while the importance which was still attached to the real document by the family of Madame de Verneuil may be gathered from the fact that it was discovered by the secretary of state in a glass bottle carefully sealed, and enclosed within a second, which was laid upon a heap of cotton, and built up in a wall of one of the apartments. Nor was this the only object of importance found in the possession of M. d'Entragues; as, together with the promise of marriage which he had professed to restore to the King, M. de Lomenie likewise discovered, secreted with equal care, sundry letters, the treaty between Philip of Spain and the conspirators, and the cypher which had been employed in their correspondence.*

From these documents it was ascertained that the King of Spain had stipulated, on oath, that, on the condition of Madame de Verneuil confiding her son to his guardianship, he should be immediately recognised as Dauphin of France, and heir to the throne of that kingdom; while five fortresses on the territory of Portugal should be placed at his disposal, and subjected to his authority, as places of refuge, should such a precaution become necessary. A similar provision was moreover

* Wraxall, Note quoted from "Le Laboureur sur Castelnau," vol. v, p. 356.

made for the marquise herself; and an income amounting to twenty thousand pounds English was also promised to the *quasi*-Prince for the support of his household.

Nor was this domestic arrangement by any means the most important feature of the conspiracy, as appointments, both civil and military, involving considerable pecuniary advantages, were also promised to the Count d'Auvergne and his step-father; and a simultaneous invasion was arranged by the Duke of Savoy in Provence, the Count de Fuentes* in Burgundy, and Spinola † in Champagne.

On the 11th of December, M. d'Entragues was conveyed in a close carriage to the prison of the Conciergerie at Paris, accompanied by his son M. de Marcoussis on horseback, but without a single attendant; and he was in confinement for a considerable time before

* Pietro Henriques Azevedo, Count de Fuentes succeeded to the command of the Spanish army on the demise of the Archduke Ernest.

† Ambroise Spinola, Marquis de los Balbazez, one of the most distinguished generals of the seventeenth century, was the descendant of an illustrious family of Geneva, whose branches spread alike over Italy and Spain. He was born in 1569, and first bore arms in Flanders. In 1604, being in command of the army, he took Ostend; and, in consequence of his important services, was appointed General of the Spanish troops in the Low Countries. When opposed to Prince Maurice of Nassau, he counterbalanced alike his renown and his success; and in 1629, when serving in Piedmont, he took the town of Casal; but died in the following year of mortification at having failed to reduce the fortress of that city.

he was allowed either fire or light; while on the same day, Madame de Verneuil was placed under the charge of M. d'Arques, the lieutenant of police, who was informed that he must answer with his life for her safe-keeping, and who accordingly garrisoned her residence with a strong body of his guards and archers.

The Count d'Entragues was no sooner incarcerated, than his wife,* following the example of her daughter-

* Marie Touchet, Countess d'Entragues, was the daughter of an apothecary at Orleans; who, on the occasion of a visit of Charles IX. to that city, obtained permission to see his Majesty dine in public, where her extreme beauty so impressed the monarch that he inquired her name; and at the close of the repast, dispatched M. de Latour, the master of his wardrobe, to desire her attendance in his closet. The negociation did not prove a difficult one; as the lady, although at the moment strongly attached to M. de Monluc, the brother of the Bishop of Valence, could not resist the *prestige* of royalty. Charles, anxious to retain her near him, requested Madame Marguerite his sister, to receive her into her household as a waiting-woman; but as she shortly afterwards became pregnant, he removed her from the court and established her in Paris, where she gave birth to Charles, Count d'Auvergne. Although tenderly beloved by the King, Marie Touchet still retained her attachment to Monluc, with whom she carried on an active correspondence, which was at length discovered by Charles; who, having on one occasion been apprised that she had at the moment a letter from her former lover in her pocket, instantly caused a number of the court ladies to be invited to supper; and they were no sooner assembled than he sent to desire a man named Chambre, the chief of a band of gipsies, to disperse a dozen of his most expert followers about the apartment, with orders to cut away the pockets of all the guests, and to bring them care-

in-law, obtained an audience of Henry, in order to implore the pardon of her husband; but it was remarked that, earnest as she was in his behalf, she never once, during the whole of the interview, made the slightest allusion either to the Count d'Auvergne or Madame de Verneuil; doubtlessly feeling that in the one case the well-known respect of the King for the blood of the Valois, and in the other his passion for the marquise, would plead more powerfully in their behalf than the most emphatic entreaties. Like that of

fully to his closet when he retired for the night. He then caused the faithless favourite to be seated beside himself, in order that she might not have an opportunity of disposing of the letter elsewhere; and the Bohemians having adroitly obeyed his instructions, the King found himself a few hours afterwards in possession of the booty. In the pocket of Marie Touchet he discovered, as he had anticipated, the letter of M. de Monluc; which, on the following morning he placed, with the most bitter reproaches, in the hands of its owner; who, on finding herself detected, declared that the pocket in which the King had discovered it was not hers, a subterfuge by which, as the letter bore no address, she hoped to escape the anger and indignation of her royal lover. Unfortunately, however, Charles recognised several of the trinkets by which it had been accompanied; and she had, consequently, no alternative save to acknowledge her fault, and to entreat for pardon. Charles, who could not resist her tears, was soon induced to promise this, provided she pledged herself to relinquish all intercourse with Monluc; and in order to render her performance of this pledge more sure, he shortly afterwards married her to the Count d'Entragues, whose complaisance he rewarded by the government of Orleans.—*L'Etoile, Hist. de Henri IV.*, vol. iii, pp. 247—249.

the Countess d'Auvergne, her attempt, however, proved abortive, save that Henry accorded to her prayers a mitigation of the rigour with which her husband had hitherto been treated.

Meanwhile, Madame de Verneuil, far from imitating the humility of her relatives, openly declared that, whatever might be the result to herself, she should never regret the measures which she had adopted to obtain justice for herself and her children; and when on one occasion she was urged to make the concessions by which alone she could hope for pardon, she answered haughtily: "I have no fear of death; on the contrary, I shall welcome it. If the King takes my life, it will at least be allowed that he sacrificed his own wife, for I was Queen before the Italian woman. I ask but three favours from his Majesty; pardon for my father, a rope for my brother, and justice for myself."*

Her reason for this expression may be found in the fact that during three examinations which he underwent, the Count d'Auvergne finally acknowledged everything, and threw the whole blame upon the marquise; feeling convinced that, under every circumstance, her life was safe; although he had previously (placing the most entire reliance on the good-faith and secresy of M. de Chevillard,† to whom he had, in conjunction

* Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, p. 98. Saint-Edme, vol. ii, p. 227. L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 247.

† Antoine Eugène Chevillard, general treasurer of the gendarmerie of France.

with his sister, confided the original treaty with Spain, and never apprehending the discovery of the documents deposited at Marcoussis), declared his innocence in the most solemn manner; and he even concluded his address to the commissioners by saying: "Gentlemen, show me one line of writing by which I can be convicted of having entered into any treaty, either with the King of Spain or his ambassador, and I will immediately sign beneath it my own sentence of death, and condemn myself to be quartered alive."

Nor was the confidence placed by M. d'Auvergne in his friend misplaced; for when Chevillard was in his turn taken to the Bastille as his accomplice, he so carefully concealed the treaty in the skirt of his doublet that it escaped the search of the officials; and on seeing himself treated as a prisoner of state, he contrived by degrees to swallow it in his soup, in order that it should not afterwards fall into their hands, in the event of his condemnation.*

The indignation of the marquise may consequently be imagined, when, after such a declaration as that which he had originally made, she ascertained that the Count had not only confessed his guilt, but that he had, moreover, revealed the most minute details of the plot; and in order to convince the King that he placed himself entirely at his mercy, had even given up to him the

* Sully, Mém., vol. v, p. 161, quoted from Amelot de la Houssaye.

mutual promise made between himself and the Dukes of Bouillon and Biron on the occasion of the previous conspiracy. Her arrogance was also encouraged by the fact that Henry, anxious to find some pretext for pardoning her treachery, sent secretly to inform her that if she would confess her fault and ask his forgiveness, it should be granted in consideration of the past, and from regard for their children; to which message the marquise vouchsafed no further reply than that those who had committed no crime, required no pardon; and in addition to this impertinence, on being informed that some of her friends, anxious to save her in spite of her own obstinacy, had asserted that she had solicited the clemency of the monarch, she bitterly reproached them for their interference, declaring that they were liars and traitors, and that she would die rather than submit to such an humiliation.*

During the exile of the marquise, the King, whose passion for Mademoiselle de Bueil had began to decrease, and who discovered that mere personal beauty offered no equivalent for the wit and fascinations of his old favourite, resolved to provide for her as he had previously done for Mademoiselle de la Bourdaisière by bestowing her upon a husband; and he accordingly effected her marriage with Henri de Harlay, Count de Chésy, a young noble, whose poverty, as well as his want of court influence, gave every security for his

* Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, p. 99.

ready submission to all the exactions of his royal master.*

The monarch, whom absence had thus only sufficed to render more devoted than ever to the marquise, and who had resolved under all circumstances to pardon her, continued to employ every method in his power to induce her to avow her error; although in searching her papers numerous letters had been discovered which revealed an amount of infidelity on her part that should have awakened his pride, and induced him to abandon her to her fate; and, at length, despairing that any minor influence would suffice to alter her resolution, and to lower her pride, he instructed M. de Sully to see her, and if possible to convince her of the injury which she was doing to her own cause by the obstinacy with which she rejected the suggestions of the King.

The minister had no alternative save obedience; and he consequently presented himself at the residence of Madame de Verneuil, whom he found as self-possessed and as self-confident as in the palmiest days of her prosperity. Instead of concessions she made conditions; and complained loudly and arrogantly of the proceedings of the sovereign; by whom she declared that she had been outraged in her honour, and from whom she sought redress rather than indulgence. This tirade was seasoned by professions of piety and repentance

* Mademoiselle de Bueil became Countess de Chésy on the 5th of October, and two months later she obtained a divorce. M. de Chésy died in 1652.

which were appreciated at their real value by her listener; who, having suffered her to exhaust herself by her own vehemence, instead of temporizing with her vanity as her friends had previously done, took up the subject in his turn, and told her that she would do well to remember that she was at that moment a prisoner under suspicion of treason; and that she might consider herself very fortunate if she were permitted to expiate her crime by self-exile to any country except Spain; bidding her remark, moreover, that this lenity could not now be exhibited towards her until she had undergone a criminal examination, and demanded the pardon of the King for her disobedience.

M. de Sully next proceeded to upbraid her with her unbecoming conduct towards the Queen; assuring her that every word or act of disrespect of which any were guilty towards the wife of the sovereign was an offence against his own person, and was likely to entail upon the culprit a very severe penalty. He then reproached her for her indecent expressions; and especially for her having more than once declared that had she not been treated with injustice, she should have been in the place occupied by "the fat banker's daughter;"* and, finally, he reprimanded her very severely for the impertinent and absurd affectation with which she had assumed to place herself upon a level with her royal mistress, and her children upon a par with the Dauphin of France; reminding her,

* Pérefixe, vol. ii, p. 401.

moreover, that the perpetual disunion of their Majesties was to be solely attributed to her malignant and malicious insinuations; and advising her to lose no time in requesting permission to throw herself at the feet of the Queen, to entreat her pardon for the past, and her indulgence for the future.

To this harangue, so different from the conciliatory and obsequious discourse of her partisans, Madame de Verneuil listened without any display of impatience, but with an ostentatious weariness which was intended to impress upon the minister the utter inutility of his interference; and when he paused to take breath, she assured him with a placid smile that she was obliged by his advice, but that she must have time to reflect before she could decide upon such a measure. M. de Sully, however, was not to be deceived by this well-acted composure; he had not carefully studied the character of the marquise without perceiving how ill she brooked control or remonstrance; and, accordingly, she had no sooner ceased speaking, than he resumed the conversation by expatiating upon the enormity of her conduct, in affecting the sudden devotion behind which she had seen fit to entrench herself, while she was daily indulging alike her jealousy and her hatred, by endeavouring not only to ruin the domestic happiness of the monarch, but even the interests of his kingdom; and when his offended listener remarked, with chilling haughtiness, that he was in no position to impugn her sincerity, he only answered the intended rebuke by persisting

that her assumed piety was a mere grimace, which could not impose upon any man of sense; a fact which he forthwith proved by detailing all her past career, and thus convincing her that no one incident of her licentious life had remained a mystery to him.

"Can you now tell me," he asked; "that these adventures existed only in the jealous imagination of the King, as you have so often assured his Majesty himself? And will you persist in denying that you have deceived him in the most unblushing manner? Believe me, Madam, if you had indeed become penitent for your past errors, and had, from a sincere return to God, desired to withdraw from the court, you would at once have obtained permission to do so with honour to yourself; but you have simply acted a part, and that so unskilfully as to have deceived no one."

At this period of the interview Madame de Verneuil could not wholly suppress her emotion, but she controlled it sufficiently to reply only by a condescending bow, and the exclamation of: "Proceed, M. le Ministre!"

"I will do so, Madam;" said M. de Sully; "by a transition from remonstrance to inquiry. Have you any legitimate subject of complaint which you conceive to warrant your failure of respect towards their Majesties?"

"If this question was dictated to you by the King, Monsieur;" was the proud reply; "he was wrong to put it, as he, better than any other person, could himself have decided; and if it be your own sugges-

tion you are no less so, since whatever may be its nature, it is beyond your power to apply the remedy."

"Then, Madam, it only remains for me to be informed of what you desire from his Majesty."

"That which I am aware will prove less acceptable to the King than to myself, M. le Ministre; but which I nevertheless persist in demanding, since I am authorised by your inquiry to repeat my request. I desire immediate permission to leave France with my parents, my brother, and my children; and to take up my permanent residence in some other country, where I shall have excited less jealousy and less malevolence than in this; and I include my brother in this voluntary expatriation because I now have reason to believe that he is suffering entirely for my sake."

Sully was startled: he could not place faith in her sincerity, and he consequently induced her to repeat her request more than once; until she at length added a condition which convinced him that she was indeed perfectly serious in the desire that she expressed.

"Do not, however, imagine, Monsieur;" she said, with a significant smile; "that I have any intention of leaving the kingdom, and taking up my abode with strangers, with the slightest prospect of dying by hunger. I am by no means inclined to afford such a gratification to the Queen, who would doubtlessly rejoice to learn that this had been the close of my career. I must have an income of a hundred thousand francs, fully and satisfactorily secured to me in land,

before I leave France; and this is a mere trifle compared with what I have a legal right to demand from the King."

"I shall submit your proposition to his Majesty, Madam;" said the minister as he rose to take his leave; "and will shortly acquaint you with the result."

Greatly to the disappointment of M. de Sully, however, he found Henry decidedly averse to the departure of Madame de Verneuil; nor could all the arguments by which he endeavoured to convince the infatuated monarch that the self-exile of the marquise was calculated to ensure his own future tranquillity, avail to overcome his distaste to the proposal.* He was weary of his purely sensual intercourse with Madame de Moret, whose extreme facility had caused him from the first to attach but little value to her possession; while her total want of intellect and knowledge of the world, continually caused him to remember with regret the dazzling although dangerous qualities of her predecessor. Marie de Medicis, moreover, who had originally looked with complacency upon his *liaison* with Mademoiselle de Bueil, rejoicing in any event which tended to estrange his affections from the marquise, had, since her melodramatic marriage, and her accession of rank, began to entertain apprehensions that another formidable rival was about to embitter her future life; while the reproaches which she constantly addressed to the monarch, and to which he

* Sully, Mém., vol v, pp. 193—197.

was compelled to submit on the subject of a woman who had merely pleased his fancy without touching his heart, were another cause of irritation; and only tended to make him look back upon the past with an ardent longing to repair it. Thus he continued to employ all his most intimate associates in an attempt to urge the marquise to make such concessions as would enable him to pardon her, with the earnestness of a repentant lover, rather than the clemency of an indulgent sovereign; and when the stern minister so signally failed to convince her reason by his representations, the King endeavoured to arouse her vanity and self-interest by the flatteries and inferences of the more courtly Bassompierre, La Varenne,* Sigogne, and others in whom he placed con-

* Guillaume Fouquet, Sieur de la Varenne, was one of those singularly-gifted individuals who, by the unaided power of intellect are raised from obscurity to fortune. On his first introduction to the court of France, his position was merely that of cloak-bearer to the King; but his excessive acuteness and his genius for intrigue, soon drew upon him the attention of the cabinet. The event that originally procured for him the favour by which he so largely profited in the sequel, was a voyage to Spain, voluntarily undertaken under unusual difficulties. The courier who was conveying to Philip the despatches of the Duke of Mayenne and the other chiefs of the League, having been taken by the emissaries of Henry IV., and the despatches opened by his ministers, it was decided that copies should be made, and the originals resealed, and forwarded to their destination by some confidential person who might bring back the replies, in order that a more perfect judgment might be formed by the council of their probable result. For such an undertaking as this, however, it was obvious that a

fidence; but all this ill-disguised anxiety only served to convince the wily favourite that she should prove victorious in the struggle; as since Henry could not bring himself to consent to her expatriation, there was no probability that he would ever be induced to take her life.

And the astute marquise judged rightly: for she was not only safe herself, but the palladium of her family. The King was no longer young; he had become satiated with the tame and facile pleasures for which he was indebted to his sovereign rank; and although opposition and haughtiness in a wife angered and disgusted him, there was a piquancy and novelty in the defiance of a mistress by which he was alike amused and interested. He could calculate upon the extent to which the Queen would venture to indulge her displeasure; but he found himself quite unable to adjudge

messenger must be found at once faithful, expert, and courageous; and such an one offered himself in the person of La Varenne, who, without a moment's hesitation offered his services to the King, and acquitted himself so dextrously of his self-imposed task, that he succeeded, not only in procuring two interviews with the Spanish council, but even an audience of Philip, without once exciting suspicion; and his arrival at Madrid had been so well-timed, that although a second courier was dispatched in all haste by the League, to announce the capture of his predecessor, he was enabled to effect his return to France with the reply of the Spanish monarch, by which Henry and his ministers were apprised of the plans and pretensions of that potentate. (*Amelot de la Houssaye, Lettres du Cardinal d'Ossat*, vol. ii, p. 17, note.) La Varenne was subsequently master-general of the Post Office.

the limits of Madame de Verneuil's daring; and thus his passion was constantly stimulated by curiosity. In her hours of fascination she delighted his fancy, and in those of irritation she excited his astonishment. Like the ocean, she assumed a new aspect every hour; and to this "infinite variety" she was in all probability indebted for the duration of her empire over the sensual and selfish affections of her royal lover.

Conscious of her power the marquise continued inexorable; and, finally, Henry found himself compelled to include her in the public accusation brought against the other conspirators; and to issue an order to the Parliament, as the supreme criminal tribunal of the kingdom, to commence without further delay the prosecution of the delinquents.

A new anxiety at this time divided the attention of the King with that which he felt for the vindication of the favourite. His permission had been asked by the Huguenots to hold a meeting at Châtellerault, and this he had at once conceded; but circumstances having arisen which induced the council to apprehend that the intrigues of the Duke de Bouillon, supported by MM. de la Trémouille, and du Plessis-Mornay,* were about

* Philippe de Mornay, Seigneur de Plessis-Marly, Governor of Samur, was born in the year 1549, at Bussy, in the department of the Oise, of a Catholic father and a Protestant mother (Françoise du Bec), the latter of whom educated him in the reformed faith. Having escaped the massacre of St. Batholomew, he visited Germany, Italy, and England, and finally entered the service of

to involve the kingdom in new troubles, M. de Sully proceeded to Poitou under pretext of taking possession of his new government, and by his unexpected appearance on the scene of action counteracted the project of the conspirators; while a short time subsequently the Duke de la Trémouille fell into a rapid decline which terminated his existence at the early age of thirty-four years, and deprived the reformed party of one of their most able and zealous leaders.

Meanwhile, amid all the dissensions, both political and domestic, by which Henry IV. had latterly been harassed, his earnest desire to improve and embellish his good city of Paris and its adjacent palaces, had continued unabated. Henry III., during whose reign the Pont Neuf had been commenced, had only lived long enough to see two of its arcades completed, and the piles destined to support the remainder raised above the river; this

Henry IV., while he was still King of Navarre, who sent him on a mission to Queen Elizabeth. His science, his valour, and his high sense of honour, rendered him after the abjuration of the monarch, the chief of the Protestant party, and caused him to be called *the Huguenot Pope*. He sustained against Duperron, Bishop of Evreux, the famous conference of Fontainebleau, at whose close each of the two parties claimed the victory. Louis XIII. deprived him of his government of Saumur; and he died in 1623, leaving issue by his wife, Charlotte de l'Arbalète, widow of the Marquis de Feuquières, one son (Plessis-Mornay, Sieur de Bauves) who was killed in 1605, while serving under Prince Maurice in the Low Countries, and three daughters, the younger of whom married the Duke de la Force.

undertaking was now completed; and numerous workmen were also constantly employed on the galleries of the Louvre, and at the châteaux of St. Germain-en-Laye, Fontainebleau, and Monceaux; the latter of which, as we have already stated, the monarch had presented to the Queen on her arrival in Paris; while, emulating the royal example, the great nobles and capitalists of the city were building on all sides, and increasing alike the extent and splendour of the metropolis.* It was at this period that Henry joined the Faubourg St. Germain to the city, and caused it to be paved; constructed the Place Royale; repaired the Hôtel de St. Louis for the purpose of converting it into a plague-hospital; and commenced building the Temple Square.†

Other great works were also undertaken throughout the kingdom; the junction of the Garonne with the Aude, an attempt which presented considerable difficulty, and which was only terminated during the reign of Louis XIV., was vigorously commenced; other rivers, hitherto comparatively useless, were rendered navigable; and the canal of Briare, with its two-and-thirty locks, although not more than half completed at the death of Henry, had already cost the enormous sum of three hundred thousand crowns. Numerous means of communication were established by highways which had not previously existed; bridges were built, and roads re-

* Mezeray, vol. x, pp. 254, 255.

† Bonnechose, Hist. de France, vol. i, p. 438, 7th edition.

paired; taxes which paralysed the manufactures of the country were remitted; the fabrication of tapestried hangings wrought in worsted, silk, and gold was earnestly encouraged; mulberry plantations were formed, and the foundation laid for the production of the costly silks and velvets for which Lyons has ever since been so famous. An imitation of the celebrated Venetian glass was also introduced with great success; and, above all, even in the midst of these expensive undertakings, a tax of four annual millions of francs, hitherto raised by the customs upon the different classes of citizens, was altogether abolished. Hope and energy were alike aroused by so vigorous a measure; and thus the people ceased to murmur, and were ready to acknowledge that the King had indeed began to verify his celebrated declaration that "if he were spared, there should not exist a workman within his realm who was not enabled to cook a fowl upon the Sunday."

* Bonnechose, vol. i, p. 438.

CHAPTER V.

[1605.]

TRIAL OF THE CONSPIRATORS—PUSILLANIMITY OF THE COUNT D'AUVERGNE —ARROGANT ATTITUDE ASSUMED BY MADAME DE VERNEUIL—SHE REFUSES TO OFFER ANY DEFENCE—DEFENCE OF THE COUNT D'ENTRAGUES—THE TWO NOBLES ARE CONDEMNED TO DEATH—MADAME DE VERNEUIL IS SENTENCED TO IMPRISONMENT FOR LIFE IN A CONVENT—A MOTHER'S INTERCESSION—THE KING COMMUTES THE SENTENCE OF DEATH PASSED ON THE TWO NOBLES TO EXILE FROM THE COURT AND IMPRISONMENT FOR LIFE—EXPOSTULATIONS OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL—MADAME DE VERNEUIL IS PERMITTED TO RETIRE TO HER ESTATE—DISAPPOINTMENT OF THE QUEEN—MARRIAGE OF THE DUKE DE ROHAN—SINGULAR CEREMONY—A TILT AT THE LOUVRE—BASSOMPIERRE IS DANGEROUSLY WOUNDED—HIS CONVALESCENCE—DEATH OF CLEMENT VIII.—ELECTION OF LEO XI.—HIS SUDDEN DEATH—ELECTION OF PAUL V.—THE COUNT D'ENTRAGUES IS AUTHORISED TO RETURN TO MARCOUSSIS—MADAME DE VERNEUIL IS PARDONED AND RECALLED—MARRIAGE OF THE PRINCE DE CONTI—MADEMOISELLE DE GUISE—MARRIAGE OF THE PRINCE OF ORANGE—THE EX-QUEEN MARGUERITE—SHE ARRIVES IN PARIS—GRATITUDE OF THE KING—HER RECEPTION—MURDER AT THE HÔTEL DE SENS—EXECUTION OF THE CRIMINAL—MARGUERITE REMOVES TO THE FAUBOURG ST. GERMAIN—THE KING CONDOLES WITH HER ON THE LOSS OF HER FAVOURITE—HER DISSOLUTE CAREER—HER ABLE POLICY—DEATH OF M. DE LA RIVIÈRE—EXECUTION OF M. DE MERARGUES—ATTEMPT TO ASSASSINATE HENRY IV.—MAGNANIMITY OF THE MONARCH—HENRY SEEKS TO INITIATE THE QUEEN INTO THE MYSTERIES OF GOVERNMENT—"MADAME LA RÉGENTE"—A TIMELY WARNING.

CHAPTER V.

[1605.]

THE year 1605 commenced, as had been the case each year since the peace, with a succession of court-festivals; tilts and tournaments, balls and masquerades, occupied the attention of the privileged; presents of value were exchanged by the sovereigns and princes; and during all this incessant dissipation, the Parliament was diligently employed upon the trial of the conspirators.

On Saturday, the 29th of January, the Count d'Auvergne was placed on the sellette,* where L'Etoile† asserts that he communicated much more than was required of him; while the Queen, anxious to secure the condemnation of Madame de Verneuil, and at the same time to intimidate the favourites by whom she

* A very low wooden stool upon which accused persons were formerly seated during their trial; an arrangement deemed so great a degradation by persons of condition that many attainted nobles indignantly appealed against it.

† L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 256.

might be succeeded, appeared in person as one of the accusing witnesses; nor did Henry, who had already decided upon the pardon of the marquise, attempt to dissuade her from this extraordinary measure; and it is even probable that as the design of the King was merely to humble the pride of the haughty marquise, in order to render her more submissive to his authority, he was by no means disinclined to suffer Marie to give free vent to her indignation and contempt.

The Parliament had nominated as its commissaries, Achille de Harlay, the first president,* and MM. Etienne Dufour and Philibert Turin, counsellors, to whose interrogatories, however, the Count d'Auvergne at first

* Achille de Harlay was the representative of a distinguished family, many of whose members were celebrated during four centuries both as magistrates and ecclesiastics. He was born on the 7th of May, 1536, and was the son of Christophe de Harlay, President *de Mortier* of the Parliament of Paris, one of the most learned and upright magistrates of his time. Achille was a parliamentary counsellor at the age of twenty-two years, president of the Parliament of Paris at thirty-six, and succeeded his father-in-law, Christophe de Thou, as first president, in 1582. During the time of the League under Henry III., he made to the Duke de Guise the celebrated answer which covered him with glory, and paralysed the strength of the malcontents: "My soul belongs to my God, and my heart to my King, although my body is in the power of rebels." He was imprisoned for a time by the chiefs of the League, after which he returned to the service of the King. He resigned his office in favour of Nicolas de Verdun; and died on the 23rd of October, 1616, at the age of eighty years.

refused to reply, alleging as his reason the pardon which had been accorded to him by Henry during the past year. In this emergency, M. Louis Servin,* the King's advocate, was deputed to offer to his Majesty the remonstrance of the commissaries; and to represent that as the accused had already been convicted of conspiring, first with Maturin Carterie, and subsequently with the Duke de Biron, he was unworthy of pardon on this third occasion; while the most imperious necessity existed that an example should be made, in order to secure the safety of their Majesties and the Dauphin, which moreover, as a natural consequence, involved the tranquillity and welfare of the state.

To this appeal the King replied that the abolition accorded to the accused on the two former occasions had been granted with a view of inducing him to return to his allegiance; but that since it had failed to produce the desired result, it could form no pretext for his escape from the penalties of this new crime; and that should he persist in refusing to reply to the questions put to him by his judges, his silence must be construed into an acknowledgment of treason; upon which M. d'Auvergne immediately endeavoured to redeem his error by revealing all the details of the past plots, as

* Louis Servin distinguished himself from an early age by his extraordinary learning, and his extreme attachment to his sovereign. He was indebted for the rank of King's advocate to the Cardinal de Vendôme; and acquitted himself so admirably of the duties of his office as to justify the confidence of his patron.

well as those of the one in which he was now implicated.

Madame de Verneuil, who had been summoned to appear at the same time, excused herself upon the plea of indisposition; and it was asserted that she had caused herself to be bled, in order that the temporary delay in her examination thus secured might enable her, ere she appeared before the commissaries, to ascertain to what extent she had been implicated by the revelations of her step-brother. She no sooner learnt, however, that the count had thrown all the odium of the conspiracy upon herself, than she hastened to obey a second summons, and presented herself with her arm in a sling, to undergo in her turn the necessary interrogatories. Her manner was firm, and her delivery at once haughty and energetic. She insisted upon the innocence of her father; declared that the whole cabal had been organised by d'Auvergne; and admitted that feeling herself wronged, she had willingly entered into his views; but at the same time she coupled with this admission the assurance that having nothing with which to reproach herself, she asked for no indulgence, and was quite prepared to abide by the consequences of her attempt to do justice alike to herself and to her children.

When the Count d'Entragues was in his turn examined, he did not seek to deny his participation in the plot; but placed in the hands of his judges a written document, setting forth the services which he had rendered to the King since his accession, and

which had merely been recompensed by the government of Orleans, a dignity of which he was moreover shortly afterwards deprived in order that it might be conferred upon another, although in his zeal for the monarch he had not only exhausted his own resources, but had even raised considerable loans which still remained unliquidated. Yet, as he stated, he had uttered no complaint, although he was reduced to poverty, and deprived of the means of eligibly establishing his children, for he still had faith in the justice and generosity of his sovereign; and with this trust he had retired to his paternal home, old, sick, and poor, to await as best he might, the happy moment in which his claims should be remembered. And then it was, as he emphatically declared, that the last and crowning misfortune of a long life had overtaken him. Then it was that the King conceived that unfortunate attachment for his younger daughter, which deprived him of the greatest solace of his old age, and exposed him to the raillery and contempt of his fellow nobles, coupled with sarcastic congratulations upon the advantages which he was supposed to have derived from the dishonour of his child; an event which had clouded his remnant of existence with shame and despair. He had, as he asserted, several times requested of his Majesty that he might be permitted to withdraw entirely from the court, and finish his days in retirement and in the bosom of his family; but this favour had constantly been denied. As a last effort he had then represented the deplorable state of

his health, and entreated that he might be permitted to travel in order to regain his strength, leaving his wife and children at Marcoussis; a favour which was also not only refused, but rendered doubly bitter by a prohibition either to see or correspond with his daughter whose safety was at that moment endangered by the menaces of the Queen. He then entered briefly into the circumstances of the conspiracy, and concluded by declaring that no attempt upon the life either of the sovereign or the Dauphin had ever been contemplated by himself or by any of his accomplices.*

Such was the defence of the dishonoured old man who had placed himself beyond the pale of sympathy by his own degrading marriage. Yet he was still a father; and who shall decide that the shame which in his own case had been silenced by the voice of passion, did not crush him with double violence when it involved the reputation of his child? Who shall say that he had not, in the throbbing recesses of his wrung heart, mourned with an undying remorse the fault of which he had himself been guilty, and felt that it was visited in vengeance upon the dearest object of his paternal love? Contemporary historians waste not a word upon the ruined noble, the disappointed partisan, and the disgraced father; yet the scene must have been a pitiable one in the midst of which he stood an attainted criminal, blighted in every affection, and in every hope;

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 255—257. Mezeray, vol. x, pp. 277—279. Daniel, vol. vii, p. 456.

the creditor of his King, and the victim of his paternal ambition.

The sentence of the Parliament was pronounced on the 2nd of February. The Counts d'Auvergne and d'Entragues were condemned to death for the crime of *lèse-majesté;* and Madame de Verneuil to imprisonment in the convent of Beaumont near Tours, until more ample information could be obtained of the exact extent of her participation; and meanwhile she was to be prohibited from holding any communication save with the sisterhood.

On the same day, the sentence having been instantly communicated to Madame d'Entragues, with the information that the King was about to repair to the chapel of the palace to attend mass, she hastened, accompanied by her daughter Marie de Balsac,* to the Tuileries; where the two unfortunate women threw themselves on their knees before Henry as he entered the great gallery; and with tears and sobs entreated mercy, the one for her husband, and the other for her father. The monarch burst into tears as he saw them at his feet. He could not forget that the mourners thus prostrate before him were the mother and the sister of the woman whom he still loved; and as he raised them from the ground, he said soothingly: "You shall see that I am indulgent—I will convene a council this very day. Go, and pray to God to inspire me with right resolutions,

* Marie de Balsac d'Entragues, in pursuit of whom the King incurred the risk of assassination.

while I proceed in my turn to mass with the same intention."*

The King kept his word. In the afternoon the council again met, when he charged them upon their consciences to deliberate seriously before they condemned two of their fellow-creatures to an ignominious death; but they remained firm in their decision; declaring that by extending pardon to crimes of so serious a nature as those upon which judgment had just been passed, nothing but danger and disorder could ensue; and that after the execution of the Duke de Biron, individuals convicted of the same offence could not be suffered to escape with impunity, without endangering by such misplaced clemency the safety of the kingdom; while a revocation of the sentence now pronounced would moreover tend to bring contempt upon the judicial authority.

Henry listened, but he would not yield; and before the close of the meeting, contrary to the advice of all his council, he announced that he commuted the pain of death in both instances to perpetual imprisonment; and revoked the sentence that condemned the marquise to the cloister, which he superseded by an order of exile to her own estate of Verneuil.

To express the disappointment and mortification of the Queen when this decision was announced to her, would be impossible; as she instantly felt that any

* Richer, Mercure Français, Paris, 1611, year 1605, pp. 9—11.

further attempt to destroy the influence of the favourite must prove ineffectual. She no longer exhibited any violence, but became a prey to the deepest melancholy; weeping where she had formerly reproached, and seeking her only consolation in prayer, and in the society of her chosen friends. Upon Henry, however, the effect of his extraordinary and ill-judged leniency was far different. Although mercy, and even indulgence, had been extended towards the marquise without eliciting one word either of entreaty or of acknowledgment, he felt convinced that so marked an exhibition of his favour must be recompensed by a return of affection on her part; and thus he continued to participate in the gaieties of the court with a zest which was strangely contrasted by the gloom and sadness of his royal consort; and even derived amusement from the epigrams and satires which were circulated at his expense among the people.

On the 13th of the month M. de Rohan* was married

* Henri, Duke de Rohan, Prince de Léon, was the eldest son of Réné, second Viscount de Rohan; and was born at Blein in Brittany, in 1579. He made his first campaign under Henry IV., by whom he had been adopted, and who had declared his intention to make him his successor on the French throne should Marie de Medicis fail to give him a son. Henry created him duke and peer in 1603, and colonel-general of the Swiss guards in 1605; but after the death of the King, he entered into a struggle with the court, declared himself the head of the Protestant party, and sustained three campaigns against Louis XIII., the last of which was terminated by his compelling that monarch

at Ablon* to Marguerite de Béthune, the daughter of the Duke de Sully, whom Henry had previously determined to bestow upon the Count de Laval ;† and not

(in 1629) to sign for the second time, a confirmation and re-establishment of the Edict of Nantes. He next entered into a negociation with the Porte for the purchase of the island of Cyprus; and subsequently became Generalissimo of the Venetians against the Imperialists; then General of the Grisons; and, finally, displeased and disgusted with the French court, he withdrew to the territories of the Duke of Saxe-Weimar, in whose service he was killed, in 1638. He left an only child, Marguerite, who married Henry de Chabot, and whose descendants took the name of Rohan-Chabot.

* Ablon was a small village upon the Seine, distant about three leagues from the capital, where the Protestants celebrated their worship before they built the church at Charenton, which was subsequently destroyed.

† Guy, Count de Laval, was one of the richest and most accomplished noblemen of his time. He not only inherited all the wealth of his father, but also that of his grandfather François de Coligny; a fact which, after his death, caused a lawsuit between the family of La Trémouille and the Duke d'Elbœuf. His qualities, both physical and mental, were worthy of his extraordinary fortune; and his devotion to literature and the fine arts was unwearied. M. de Laval had been reared in the Protestant faith; but to the great regret of the reformed party, who had hoped to find in him as zealous a defender as they had found in his ancestors, he embraced the Romish religion. His valour as a soldier was as remarkable as his attainments; and he had scarcely reached his twentieth year when he asked, and obtained, from the King, the royal permission to serve under the Archduke Matthias in Hungary against the Turks. Accompanied by fifteen or sixteen gentlemen, and attended by a retinue befitting his rank and wealth, he

only did he confer the honour of his presence upon the well-dowered bride, but he also signed her marriage-contract, and presented to her ten thousand crowns for the purchase of her *trousseau*, with a similar sum to her bridegroom to defray the expenses of the wedding-feast. A singular ceremony succeeded to the nuptial blessing; for M. de Rohan had no sooner led his newly-made wife from the altar, than his ducal coronet was placed upon his brow, his ducal mantle flung upon his shoulders, and in this pompous costume he was, at the close of the banquet, escorted to Paris by the princes and nobles who had been the guests of M. de Sully.

Seldom had the King evinced more gaiety of heart than at this particular period, or appeared to derive greater amusement from the gossipry of the court, and the gallantries of the courtiers; and he no sooner ascertained that Mademoiselle d'Entragues had become the mistress of Bassompierre, than he said laughingly to the Duke de Guise: "D'Entragues despises us all in her idolatry of Bassompierre. I have good grounds for what I state."

"Well, Sire;" was the reply; "you can be at no

eminently distinguished himself by the manner in which he effected the retreat after the siege of Strigonia; but his first triumph was fated to be his last, as during the struggle he received a gun-shot wound of which he died a few days subsequently, deeply regretted by the Prince in whose cause he had fallen, and by the troops, to whom he had already endeared himself by his noble qualities.

loss to revenge the affront; while for myself, I know of no means so fitting as those of knight-errantry, and I am consequently ready to break three lances with him this afternoon, at any hour and place which your Majesty may be pleased to ordain."

The preparations for this combat are so graphically described by Bassompierre himself, and so characteristic of the manners of the time, that we shall offer no apology for giving them in his own words.

"The King acceded to our wishes, as such encounters were by no means unusual, and told us that the tilting should take place in the great court of the Louvre, which he would cause to be covered with sand. M. de Guise selected as his seconds his brother the Prince de Joinville, and M. de Thermes;* while I

* César Auguste de St. Lary, Baron de Thermes, was the son of Jean de St. Lary and of Anne de Villemur, and was the younger brother of Roger de St. Lary, Duke de Bellegarde, Grand-Equerry of France. He was first created Knight of Malta and Grand-Prior of Auvergne, and subsequently, on the dismission of the Duke de Bellegarde, Grand-Equerry in his stead. Having incurred the displeasure of Marie de Medicis, he was compelled to leave the court, when he proceeded to Holland where he was warmly welcomed by Prince Maurice; a welcome which was not lessened by the fact of his being accompanied by forty gentlemen. The anger of the Queen having subsided, he returned to France, where, as previously stated, he succeeded to the honours of his brother, was made a knight of St. Michael and the Holy Ghost, and died of a wound which he had received at the siege of Clerac in July, 1621.

chose M. de Saint-Luc* and the Count de Sault.† We all six dressed and armed ourselves at the house of Saint-Luc; and as we had armour and liveries ready for every occasion, my party wore silver-mail, with plumes of red and white, as were our silk stockings; while M. de Guise and his troop, on account of the imprisonment of Madame de Verneuil, of whom he was secretly the lover, were dressed and armed in black and

* François d'Episnay, second of the name, was the son of François d'Episnay, Seigneur de Saint-Luc, knight of St. Michael and of the Holy Ghost, and grand-master of artillery, who was killed at the siege of Amiens in 1597. In the preceding year, at the early age of fourteen, the young Saint-Luc had a quarrel with Emmanuel-Monsieur, the son of the Duke de Mayenne, by whom he conceived that he had been insulted; and who, upon his demanding whether the affront were intended as a jest, or designed as an insult, replied that he might interpret it as he pleased, inquiring at the same time if he were not aware who he was? "Yes, I know you;" was the reply of the high-spirited boy; "you are the son of the Duke de Mayenne; and you are in your turn aware that I am the son of Saint-Luc, a loyal gentleman who has always served his country with fidelity, and never borne arms against his lawful sovereign." This quarrel between two mere youths having reached the ears of the King, he forbade the disputants to proceed further; but the young Saint-Luc had thus already, alike by his courage and his ready wit, given ample promise of his future loyalty and prowess.

† Guillaume de Sault (or Saulx) was the son of the celebrated Gaspard de Saulx, Maréchal de Tavannes. He married Chrétienne d'Aguirre, the daughter of Michel d'Aguirre, a celebrated jurisconsult of the diocese of Pampeluna; was created Lieutenant-Governor of Burgundy, and died in 1633.

gold. In this equipage we arrived at the Louvre, myself and my friends being the first upon the ground."*

Henry, with his whole court, both male and female, were present on the occasion, and the lists were placed immediately beneath the windows of the Queen's apartments; but the diversion was not fated to be of long duration, for at the first encounter the lance of M. de Guise entered the body of his antagonist, and inflicted so formidable a wound that he was carried from the spot, and laid upon the bed of the Duke de Vendôme, apparently in a dying state. After his hurt had been dressed, the Queen sent her sedan chair to convey him to his residence.

Although Bassompierre, in the preceding column, assures his readers that "such encounters were by no means unusual," he goes on to state that directly he fell, the King not only forbade the continuance of the tournay, but would never permit another to take place; and that this was the only one which had been held in France for the preceding century.†

"No one can imagine," says the wounded hero in continuation; "the multitude of visits that I received, especially from the ladies. All the princesses came to see me; and the Queen on three occasions sent her maids of honour, who were brought to me by Mademoiselle de Guise, and stayed during the whole afternoon."

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 43.

† Idem.

These courtly diversions were abruptly terminated by the intelligence which reached Paris of the death, on the 3rd of March, of Pope Clement VIII.* The piety of this distinguished Pontiff, and the eminent services which he had rendered to the French king, caused his loss to be deeply felt by Henry; but when, on the 1st day of April, Alessandro de Medicis, the cousin of the Queen, was unanimously elected as his successor under the title of Leo XI., nothing could exceed the joy which was manifested throughout the country. Paris was illuminated, bonfires were lighted on the surrounding heights, and salvos of artillery rang from the dark walls of the Bastille. This demonstration proved, however, to be premature, as the next courier who arrived in the French capital from Rome, brought the fatal tidings of his death. On the day succeeding his elevation he had made his solemn entry into St. Peter's; on Easter Sunday the triple tiara was placed upon his brow; and the public procession to St. John de Latran took place on the 17th; but on returning from this ceremony, the new Pontiff com-

* Hypolito Aldobrandini, subsequently Clement VIII., was a Florentine by birth, who, in the year 1585, was made grand penitentiary and cardinal by Pope Sixtus V. His diplomatic talents caused him to be sent as legate to Poland to arrange the difficulties between Sigismond of Sweden and the Archduke Maximilian, who had both been elected King of Poland by their several partisans. On the death of Innocent IX., Aldobrandini was raised to the pontifical chair (1592), which he occupied during thirteen years.

plained of indisposition, and on the 27th he breathed his last; and was in his turn succeeded, on the Day of Pentecost (29th of May) by Paul V.*

About this time the King wearied of the perpetual coldness of Madame de Verneuil, which not even his excessive clemency had sufficed to overcome, made a last attempt to compel her gratitude by forwarding letters under the great seal, authorising the Count d'Entragues to retire to his estate of Marcoussis; and re-establishing both himself and his son-in-law in all their wealth and honours, save the posts which they had held under the crown, and their respective governments. D'Auvergne, however, was still a prisoner in the Bastille; where, after lashing himself into fury for a few months, he adopted the more prudent and manly alternative of study, and thus contrived to educe enjoyment even from his privations.

Yet still the haughty spirit of the marquise scorned

* Camillo Borghèse was a native of Rome, whose family were originally from Sienna. Clement VIII. called him to a seat in the conclave in 1598. After his elevation to the pontifical chair, he quarrelled with the republic of Venice, the result of the difference between the two states being the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Venetian territories. He succeeded in effecting the union of the Nestorians of Chaldea to the Romish church, and in appeasing for a time several controversial differences between members of his own communion. Paul V. greatly embellished the city of Rome; it was he who completed the *façade* of St. Peter's, and the palace of the Quirinal. He died in 1621, at the age of sixty-nine years.

to yield. She was indeed living in her own house, the gift of the monarch against whom she exhibited this firm and calm defiance, and surrounded by luxuries, the whole of which she owed to his uncalculating generosity; but she could not, and would not, forget that she was, nevertheless, an exile from the court, and a prisoner within the boundary of her estate, while the Queen, whom she had affected to despise, was triumphing in her disgrace; nor was it until the month of September, when Henry, who was pining for her return, finally declared, that no proof of culpability having been brought against her, she must be forthwith duly and fully acquitted of the crime with which she had been charged, that the icy barrier was at last borne down, and the haughty marquise condescended to acknowledge herself indebted to her sovereign. The King did not satisfy himself with this mere declaration, though he had caused it to be legally registered by the Parliament; but, fearful lest some further revelations might be made, by which she might become once more involved, he moreover strictly forbade his attorney-general to take any new steps whatever relating to the conspiracy, or tending further to incriminate any of its presumed members.*

The jealousy which existed between the two houses of Bourbon and Lorraine, and which Henry was anxious if possible to terminate, coupled perhaps with no

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 280.

small feeling of wounded vanity, determined him to bestow the hand of Louise Marguerite de Lorraine, Demoiselle de Guise, (who, since she had been in the household of the Queen had lent a less willing ear than formerly to his renewed gallantries), upon François, Prince de Conti; and, accordingly the marriage was celebrated with great pomp in the month of July, in the presence of their Majesties and the whole court. Madame de Conti herself asserts that the Queen first suggested this union, and did everything in her power to effect it;* for which it is highly probable that Marie had a double motive, as the antecedents of Mademoiselle de Guise might well excuse her jealousy.

While besieging Paris, and before his public *liaison* with Gabrielle d'Estrées, Henry had sent to demand the portrait of Mademoiselle de Guise, giving her reason to believe that so soon as the war should be terminated, he was desirous to make her his wife; a prospect which, as she very *naïvely* acknowledges, led her to despise the addresses of the Count de Giury,† who was her declared suitor, as well as those of the other nobles who sought her favour. One day, however, during a brief truce of six hours, the Duchess de Guise and herself, accompanied by several other ladies, having ascended the rampart to

* Amours du Grand Alcandre, p. 47.

† Anne d'Anglure, Seigneur de Giury, who subsequently married Marguerite Hurault, daughter of Philip Hurault, Count de Chiverny, Chancellor of France under Henry III. and Henry IV.

converse with such of their friends as were in the besieging army, all the young gallants crowded to the foot of the walls to pay their respects to the fair being whose presence offered so graceful a contrast to the objects by which they were more immediately surrounded; and among the rest came Roger, Duke de Bellegarde, at that period the handsomest man in France.

It was the first occasion upon which Mademoiselle de Guise and the duke had met; and we have the authority of the lady for stating that the attraction was mutual. M. de Bellegarde had long been the avowed lover of *la belle Gabrielle;* but, inconstant as the fair d'Estrées herself, he at once surrendered his previously-occupied heart to this new goddess. His prior attachment was not, however, the only reason which should have deterred Mademoiselle de Guise from thus suffering her fancy to overcome her better feelings, as M. de Bellegarde was accused of having been accessory to the assassination of her father; but neither of these considerations appears to have had any weight with the young Princess. According to her own version of the circumstance, Gabrielle conceived so violent a jealousy, that the duke was compelled to condescend to every imaginable subterfuge in order to conceal the truth; while the King, who soon became aware of the secret intelligence which subsisted between the lovers, ceased to feel any inclination to raise Mademoiselle de Guise to the throne of France; although, as we have seen, he

was by no means insensible either to the charm of her wit, or the attraction of her beauty.

In order to follow up his great design of pacification, Henry, after having re-established Philip of Nassau in his principality of Orange, also effected his marriage with Eléonore de Bourbon,* by which alliance he secured another desirable ally.†

During the development of the late conspiracy, the monarch had been indebted for much of the information which he had received relative to the intrigues of the Count d'Auvergne, to the intelligence afforded by the ex-Queen Marguerite; who having come into possession of many facts which could not otherwise have been known to the King, had assiduously imparted to him every circumstance that she conceived to be of importance; a service for which he had not failed to express his gratitude. That Marguerite had, however, been in no small degree actuated in this matter by feelings of self-interest, there can be no doubt, d'Auvergne having long enjoyed the proprietorship of the county from

* Eléonore de Bourbon was the daughter of Henry I. de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, who succeeded his father in the command of the Calvinist party, conjointly with the King of Navarre, afterwards Henry IV. This Prince raised a body of foreign troops, in 1575, and distinguished himself greatly at Coutras, in 1587. He died in the following year, having, as was asserted, been poisoned by his wife, Charlotte de la Trémouille, at St.-Jean-d'Angely.

† Montfaucon, vol. v, p. 418.

whence he derived his title, and which had been bestowed on him by Henry III.; as well as several other estates which that monarch had inherited from his mother Catherine de Medicis; the said territories having formed a portion of her dowry on her union with Henry II. Marguerite's memories of her brother, as the reader will readily comprehend, were not sufficiently attaching to induce her to submit patiently to such a substitution; as she was aware that, by the marriage contract, the property in question was settled upon the female offspring of Catherine in default of male issue; and her lavish expenditure and errant adventures having exhausted her means, she resolved to exert every effort to establish her claim. She had already upon several occasions solicited permission to return to the French capital; and, although it had never been distinctly refused, it was so coldly conceded that her pride had hitherto prevented her availing herself of an indulgence thus reluctantly accorded; but aware at the present moment that she could so materially serve the King as to ensure a more gracious reception than she might previously have anticipated, she resolved to seize the opportunity; and, accordingly, greatly to the surprise, not only of the whole court, but of the monarch himself, she arrived in Paris without having intimated her intention, lest the permission should be revoked.

For five-and-twenty years, the last survivor of the illustrious house of Valois had existed in obscurity and poverty among the mountains and precipices of the

inhospitable county of Auvergne, apparently forgetting for a time that world by which she had been so readily forgotten; but Marguerite began at length to yearn for a restoration of her privileges as a member of the great human family. She could not have chosen a more judicious moment in which to hazard so extreme a step; as in addition to the respect which, despite all her vices, she could still command as the descendant of a long line of sovereigns, she had latterly established many claims upon the gratitude of the King. It was impossible for him not to feel, and that deeply, the generous self-abnegation with which she had lent herself to the dissolution of their ill-omened marriage, when not only his own happiness, but that of the whole nation, required the sacrifice; nor could he fail to remember that while those upon whom he lavished alike his affection and his treasure, had constantly laboured to embitter his domestic life, and to undermine the dignity of his Queen, the repudiated wife had never once evinced the slightest disposition to withhold from her the deference and respect to which she was entitled.

Thus then, when her near approach to the capital was suddenly announced to him, Henry lost not a moment in hastening, with his royal consort and a brilliant retinue, to receive her before she could reach the gates; and gave orders that the palace of Madrid in the Bois de Boulogne should immediately be prepared in a befitting manner for her residence. Nor was Marie de Medicis less willing than himself to

welcome the truant Princess, to whom she was aware that she owed many obligations; and the meeting was consequently a cordial one on both sides. After the usual ceremonies had been observed, Marguerite, abandoning the litter in which she had hitherto travelled, took her place in the state coach beside their Majesties, by whom she was conducted to her appointed abode; nor was it until repeated expressions of regard had been exchanged between the ex-Queen and her successor, that the royal party returned to the Tuileries.

After a sojourn of six weeks in the palace of Madrid, during which time Marguerite not only revealed to the monarch all the details of the Verneuil conspiracy, but also the particulars of another, still more serious, as it involved the cession of Marseilles, Toulon, and other cities to the Spaniards, she became wearied of the forest-villa, and established herself in the archiepiscopal Hôtel de Sens;* an arrangement to which the King

* This hôtel was the property of the Bishop of Bourges, known as M. de Sens, who died in September, 1606, at the age of seventy-nine years; and who was interred at Notre-Dame, at his own request, without pomp or ceremony of any description. This prelate had been involved in so many delicate, but withal conspicuous affairs, that he had become the object of very general curiosity and slander. At the commencement of the reign of Henry IV., a satire made its appearance, entitled: "Library of Madame de Montpensier, brought to light by the advice of Cornac, and with the consent of the Sieur de Beaulieu, her equerry;" in which mention was made of a supposititious work called: "The Art of not Believing in God," by M. de Bourges, in which an

consented on condition that she should make him two promises, one of which was that she would be more careful of her health, "and not turn night into day, and day into night," as she was accustomed to do; and the other, that she would restrain her liberality, and endeavour to economise. To these requests the Princess cheerfully answered that she would make an effort to obey his Majesty upon the first point, although it would be a privation almost beyond endurance, from the habit in which she had so long indulged of enjoying the sunrise before she retired to rest; but with regard to the other she must decline to give a pledge which she was certain to falsify, no Valois having ever succeeded in such an attempt. It is probable that Henry, from a consciousness of his own peculiar prodigalities, did not feel himself authorised to insist upon a rigid observance of his expressed wish, as although

attempt was made to convict the prelate of Atheism. This book was attributed to the reformed party; while the libel was strengthened by the indignation felt by the court of Rome at the circumstance of M. de Bourges having taken upon himself to absolve Henry IV. without the papal authority, on his conversion to the Roman Catholic faith. The manner of his death, however, gainsayed the calumny; although so slight had been the respect felt for his sacred office, that the ex-Queen Marguerite had no sooner taken possession of his hôtel, than the following placard was found affixed to the entrance-gate:

"Comme Reine, tu devais être
En ta royale maison;
Comme ——, s'est bien raison
Que tu loge au logis d'un prêtre."

Marguerite had so frankly refused to regulate her expenditure with more prudence, she was nevertheless permitted to remain in the asylum which she had chosen; and this she continued to do until the 5th of April, 1606, when she was driven from it by a tragedy that rendered it hateful to her.

Slender as was her retinue, it unfortunately included a young favourite named Saint-Julien,* who from some private pique had induced her to discharge from her service two attendants who had from their earliest youth been members of her household, the one as page, and the other as maid of honour; and who had ultimately married with her consent and approbation, but upon being thus cast off, had found themselves ruined; no noble house being willing to receive the dismissed attendants of the dishonoured Queen. Of this union a son had been born, however, possessed of less patience and self-government than his unfortunate parents, who after having clung to Marguerite through good and evil fortune, now found themselves abandoned to all the miseries of poverty and neglect. This youth, called by L'Etoile Vermond, and by Bassompierre Charmond, made his way to Paris as best he might, and arrived in the capital after Marguerite had taken up her residence as already stated in the Faubourg St. Antoine. There can be no doubt that the utter destitution of his parents had made him desperate, for he could not rationally

* Bassompierre calls him Saint-Sulliendat.—*Mém.*, p. 46.

indulge the slightest hope of impunity; suffice it, that as the Princess was alighting from her coach on her return from attending mass at the abbey of the Celestines, between mid-day and one o'clock on the 5th of April, while her favourite stood beside the steps to assist her to descend, the unhappy Vermond shot him through the head; and then, turning his horse towards the gate of St. Denis, endeavoured to make his escape. He was, however, too ill-mounted to succeed in this attempt; the carriage of the ex-Queen having been followed by many of the nobles who were anxious to propitiate the favour of the King by so easy a display of respect to the unthroned Marguerite; and ere he reached the barrier the wretched young man found himself a prisoner.

The body of his victim had, meanwhile, been conveyed to an apartment on the ground-floor of the hôtel, where on his arrival he was immediately confronted with it; but no sign of remorse or regret was visible as he gazed upon the corpse. "Turn it over;" he said huskily, after he had gazed for awhile upon the glazed eyes and the parted lips. "Let me see if he be really dead." His request was complied with; and as he became convinced that life had indeed departed from the already stiffening form, he exclaimed joyfully: "It is well—I have not failed—my task is accomplished. Had it been otherwise I could yet have repaired the error."

When this scene was reported to Marguerite, who, absorbed in the most passionate grief, had retired to her apartment, she vowed that she would not touch food

until she had vengeance on the murderer; and she kept her word, as she persisted in her resolution till, on the third day after he had committed the crime, the unhappy young man was decapitated in front of the house, and almost upon the very spot still reeking with the blood of his victim. But the nerves of the ex-Queen could endure no further tension; and on the morrow she removed to a new residence in the Faubourg St. Germain, where she was shortly afterwards visited by Bassompierre, who was charged with the condolences of the King on her late loss.*

This fact alone tends more fully to develope the manners and morals (?) of the age than a thousand comments; and thus we have considered it our duty to place it upon record.

Meanwhile, M. de Saint-Julien was far from having been the only favourite of the profligate Marguerite, who divided her time between devotional exercises and the indulgence of those guilty pleasures to which she was so unhappily addicted; but while the citizens were not slow to remark her excesses, she gained the love of the poor by a profuse alms giving, and enjoyed a perfect impunity of action from the real or feigned ignorance of the King relative to the private arrangements of her household. She was, moreover, the avowed patroness of men of letters, by whom her table was constantly surrounded; and in whose society she took so much delight that

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 353, 354. Bassompierre, Mém., p. 46.

she acquired, by this constant intercourse with the most learned individuals of the capital, a facility not only of expression, but also of composition, very remarkable in one of her sex at that period.* Carefully avoiding all political intrigue, she made no distinction of persons beyond that due to their rank; and thus, while her intercourse with the Queen was marked by an affectionate respect peculiarly gratifying to its object, she was no less urbane and condescending to the Marquise de Verneuil; who had, as may have been anticipated, already regained all her former influence over the mind of the monarch, his passion even appearing to have derived new strength from their temporary estrangement.

The peculiar situation of the Queen, however, who was about once more to become a mother, and whose tranquillity of mind he feared to disturb at such a moment, rendered the monarch unusually anxious to conceal this fact; and it was consequently, not until some weeks afterwards, that Marie de Medicis was apprised of the new triumph of her rival.

The month of December accordingly passed away without the domestic discord which must have arisen had the Queen been less happily ignorant of her real position; but it was nevertheless fated to be an eventful one. The death of M. de la Rivière, the King's body-surgeon, a loss which was severely felt by Henry,

* Richelieu, La Mère et le Fils, vol. i, p. 326.

was succeeded by the execution of M. de Merargues,* whose conspiracy to deliver up Marseilles to the Spaniards was revealed to the monarch by Marguerite; and who, tried and convicted of *lèse-majesté*, was decapitated in the Place de Grêve, his body quartered and exposed at the four gates of the capital, and his head carried to Marseilles, and stuck upon a pike over the principal entrance of the city; while, on the very day of his execution, as the King was returning from a hunt, and riding slowly across the Pont Neuf, at about five in the afternoon, a man suddenly sprang up behind him, and threw him backwards upon his horse, attempting at the same time to plunge a dagger which he held into the body of his Majesty. Fortunately, however, Henry was so closely muffled in a thick cloak, that before he could effect his purpose, the attendants were enabled to seize him and liberate their royal master, who was perfectly uninjured. The consternation was nevertheless universal; nor was it lessened by the calmness with which when interrogated, the assassin declared that his intention had been to take the life of the sovereign. It was soon discovered, however, by the

* Louis de Lagon de Merargues was a nobleman of Provence, who claimed to descend from the Princes of Catalonia or Aragon. His position of procureur-syndic of the department, and the importance of the relatives of his wife, who was closely connected with the Duke de Montpensier, together with the command of two galleys which he held from the King, enabled him at any moment to possess himself of the port; while his office of *Viguier*, or royal provost, gave him great authority over the citizens.

incoherency of his language, that he was a maniac; and although many of the nobles urged that he should be put to death as an example to others, the King resolutely resisted their advice, declaring that his family, who had long been aware of his infirmity, were more to blame than himself; and commanding that he should be placed in security, and thus rendered unable to repeat any act of violence. He was accordingly conveyed to prison, where he shortly afterwards died.

At this period, whether it were that the King hoped by occupying her attention with subjects of more moment, to be enabled to pursue his *liaison* with Madame de Verneuil with less difficulty, or that his advancing age rendered him in reality anxious to initiate her into the mysteries of government, it is certain that he endeavoured to induce the Queen to take more interest than she had hitherto done in questions of national importance; and revealed to her many state secrets, not one of which, as he afterwards declared to Sully, did she ever communicate, even to her most confidential friends. But Marie de Medicis was far from evincing the delight which he had anticipated at his avowed wish that she should share with him in the hopes and disappointments of royalty; her ambition had not then been thoroughly awakened; she still felt as a wife and as a woman rather than as a Queen; and an insolence from Madame de Verneuil occupied her feelings more nearly than a threatened conspiracy. So great, indeed, was her distaste to the new character in which she was

summoned to appear, that when the King occasionally addressed her with a gay smile as *Madame la Régente*, a cloud invariably gathered upon her brow. Upon one occasion, when the royal couple were walking in the park at Fontainebleau, attended by all the court, and that the monarch, who led the Dauphin by the hand, vainly endeavoured to induce him to jump across a little stream which ran beside their path, Henry became so enraged by his cowardice and obstinacy that he raised him in his arms to dip him into the pigmy current, a punishment which was, however, averted by the entreaties of his mother; and the King reluctantly consented that he should suffer nothing more than the mortification of being compelled to exchange her care for that of his governess, Madame de Montglat. As the child was led away the King sighed audibly, but in a few seconds he resumed the conversation which had been thus unpleasantly interrupted; and once more he addressed the Queen as *Madame la Régente.*

"I entreat of you, Sire, not to call me by that name;" said Marie; "it is full of associations which cannot fail to be painful to me."

The King looked earnestly and even sadly upon her for a moment ere he replied, and then it was in a tone as grave as that in which she uttered her expostulation. "You are right;" he said; "quite right not to wish to survive me, for the close of my life will be the commencement of your own troubles. You have occasionally shed tears when I have flogged your son, but one day

you will weep still more bitterly either over him or yourself. My favourites have often excited your displeasure, but you will find yourself some time hence more ill-used by those who obtain an influence over the actions of Louis. Of one thing I can assure you; and that is, knowing your temper so well as I do, and foreseeing that which his will prove in after-years—you, Madam, self-opinionated, not to say headstrong, and he obstinate—you will assuredly break more than one lance together."*

Poor Marie! She was little aware at that moment how soon so mournful a prophecy was to become a still more mournful reality.

* Richelieu, La Mère et le Fils, vol. i, pp. 19, 20.

CHAPTER VI.

[1606.]

NEW YEAR'S DAY AT COURT — THE ROYAL TOKENS — A SINGULAR AUDIENCE — A PROPOSITION — BIRTH OF THE PRINCESS CHRISTINE — PUBLIC FESTIVITIES — A BALLET ON HORSEBACK — THE KING RESOLVES TO HUMBLE THE DUKE DE BOUILLON — ARGUMENTS OF THE QUEEN — POLICY OF HENRY — THE COURT PROCEEDS TO TORCY — SURRENDER OF BOUILLON — THE SOVEREIGNS ENTER SEDAN — REJOICINGS OF THE CITIZENS — STATE ENTRY INTO PARIS — THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE ASSIGNS TO THE EX-QUEEN MARGUERITE THE COUNTY OF AUVERGNE — THE "TE DEUM" — MARGUERITE MAKES A DONATION OF HER RECOVERED ESTATES TO THE DAUPHIN — INCONSISTENCIES OF MARGUERITE — JEALOUSY OF THE QUEEN OF MADAME DE MORET — INCREASING COLDNESS OF THE KING TOWARDS THAT LADY — THE FRAIL RIVALS — PRINCELY BEACONS — INDIGNATION OF THE QUEEN — NARROW ESCAPE OF THE KING AND QUEEN — GRATITUDE OF THE QUEEN TO HER PRESERVER — INSOLENT PLEASANTRY OF THE MARQUISE DE VERNEUIL — A DISAPPOINTMENT COMPENSATED — MARRIAGE OF THE DUKE DE BAR — THE KING INVITES THE DUCHESS OF MANTUA TO BECOME SPONSOR TO THE DAUPHIN, AND THE DUKE DE LORRAINE TO THE YOUNGER PRINCESS — "THE MANTUAN SUITE" — PREPARATIONS AT NOTRE-DAME — THE PLAGUE IN PARIS — THE COURT REMOVES TO FONTAINEBLEAU — THE ROYAL CHRISTENINGS — INCREASE OF THE PLAGUE — ROYAL DISAPPOINTMENTS — THE DUCHESS DE NEVERS — DISCOURTESY OF THE KING — DIGNITY OF THE DUCHESS.

CHAPTER VI.

[1606.]

THE description given by M. de Sully of his interview with their Majesties on the morning of the 1st of January, 1806, is so characteristic of the time that we cannot conscientiously pass it over, although the feeling of the present day compels us to exclude many of its details. Early in the forenoon the Duke proceeded to the Louvre to pay his respects to the august couple, and to present the customary offerings; but on reaching the apartment of the King, he was informed by MM. d'Armagnac and l'Oserai, the two valets-de-chambre on duty, that his Majesty was in the chamber of the Queen, who had been seriously indisposed during the night. He consequently proceeded to the ante-room of his royal mistress, and as he found it vacant, advanced to the door of the chamber itself, against which he scratched gently, in order to attract the attention of Catarina Selveggio or Mademoiselle de la Renouillère,

her favourite attendants, and to ascertain the state of her health without awakening her. He had no sooner done so, however, than several voices loudly inquired who was there? and among them the duke recognised those of Roquelaure, Frontenac, and Beringhen.

Having declared his identity, and been announced to the King, he was immediately summoned in a cheerful voice by Henry himself: "Come in, come in, Sully;" cried the monarch; "you will think us very idle until you learn what has kept us in bed so late. My wife has been ill all night; but I will tell you all about it when there are not so many people present; and, meanwhile, let us see what you have brought for us as new year's gifts; for I observe that your three secretaries are with you laden each with a velvet bag."

"It is true, Sire;" answered the duke; "I remembered that the last occasion upon which I had seen your Majesties together, you were both in excellent spirits; and trusting to find it the case to-day, when we are all anticipating the birth of a second Prince, I have brought you some offerings which are sure to please you, as they cannot fail to gratify those to whom they are distributed in your name; a distribution which I trust may take place this evening in your presence, and that of the Queen."

"Although she says nothing to you;" laughed the King; "according to her custom of pretending to be asleep, she is as thoroughly awake as myself; but she is very angry with both of us. However, we will talk of

that some other time. And now let us see your presents."

"They are not perhaps, Sire;" said the grand-master; "such as might be expected from the treasurer of a wealthy and powerful monarch; but such as they are, I feel convinced that they will afford more real gratification to those for whom they are intended, and excite more gratitude towards your own person, than all the costly gifts which you lavish upon individuals who, as I well know, only repay your profuse liberality by ingratitude and murmurs."

"I understand you;" exclaimed the King; "it is useless to explain yourself further; rather show us what you have brought."

The duke made a signal to his secretaries to approach the bed. "Here, Sire;" he said; "in my dispatch-bag, are three purses filled with gold tokens, with a device expressive of the love borne towards your Majesty by your people. One of these I offer to yourself, another to the Queen, and the third to Monseigneur le Dauphin, or rather, I ought to say to Mamanga,* if her Majesty does not retain it, as she has always done on similar occasions. In the same bag are eight purses of silver tokens with the same device, two for yourself, two for the Queen, and four for la Renouillère, Catarina Selveggio, and any other of the ladies who sleep in the chamber of her Majesty.

* Mamanga was the name given in playfulness by the Dauphin to Madame de Montglat.

The second bag contains twenty-five purses of tokens in silver, to be distributed among Monseigneur le Dauphin, Madame de Montglat, Madame de Drou,* Mademoiselle de Piolant,† the nurses and other attendants of Monseigneur and his sister, and the waiting-maids of the Queen; in the third bag there are thirty sacks, each containing a hundred crowns in half-franc pieces, coined expressly for the purpose, and so large that they appear to be of twice the value. These are intended for all the attendants of subordinate rank attached to the household of her Majesty and the royal children, according to your orders. I have left, moreover, in my carriage below, in the charge of my people, two great bags, each containing a hundred crowns in twelve sous pieces, making the sum of twelve thousand sous, for division among the poor and sick upon the quays of the river near the Louvre, which are, as I am told, already crowded; and I have in consequence sent twelve citizens upon whom I can rely, to distribute the money conscientiously according to the necessities of each applicant. All these poor people, and even the waiting-women of her Majesty, exhibit more delight on receiving these trifling coins, Sire, than you can well believe. They all say that it is not so much for the value of the gift, as because it proves that you remember and regard them; and, moreover, the attendants of the Queen prize them in conse-

* Madame de Drou was the governess of the infant Princess.

† Mademoiselle de Piolant, femme-de-chambre to the royal children.

quence of their being free to appropriate them as they think fit, while they are compelled to employ their respective salaries according to the instructions which they receive; as they thus have a hundred crowns to expend in any finery for which they may take a fancy."

"And do you bestow all this happiness upon them without being rewarded even by a kiss?" asked Henry gaily.

"Truly, Sire;" answered the Duke; "since the day when your Majesty commanded them to recognise their obligation in that manner, I have never found it necessary to remind them of your royal pleasure, for they come voluntarily to tender their acknowledgments according to order; while Madame de Drou, devout as she is, only laughs during the performance of the ceremony."

"Come now, M. le Grand-Maître;" persisted the King; "tell me the truth; which do you consider to be the handsomest, and consequently the most welcome among them?"

"On my word, Sire;" replied M. de Sully; "that is a question which I am unable to answer, for I have other things to think of besides love and beauty; and I firmly believe that they, each and all, pay as little attention to my handsome nose as I do to theirs. I kiss them as we do relics, when I am making my offering."

Henry laughed heartily. "How say you, gentlemen;" he exclaimed, addressing the courtiers who thronged the chamber; "Have we not here a prodigal

treasurer, who makes such presents as these at the expense of his master, and all for a kiss?"

Of course the royal hilarity found a general and an immediate echo, which had no sooner subsided than the King exclaimed: "And now, gentlemen, to your breakfasts, and leave us to discuss affairs of greater importance."

In a few minutes all had left the room save Sully himself, and the two waiting-women of the Queen; and he had no sooner ascertained that such was the case than Henry said affectionately: "And now, sleeper, awake, and do not scold any longer; for I have, on my part, resolved not to think any more of what has passed, particularly at such a time as this. You fancy that Sully blames you whenever we have a difference; but you are quite wrong, as you would be aware, could you only know how freely he gives me his opinion on my own faults; and although I am occasionally angry with him, I like him none the less; on the contrary, I believe that if he ceased to love me, he would be more indifferent to all that touches my welfare and honour, as well as the good of my people; for, do you see, *ma mie*, the best-intentioned among us require at times to be supported by the wise advice of faithful and prudent friends; and he is constantly reminding me of the expediency of indulgence towards yourself, and of the necessity of keeping your mind at peace, in order that neither you, nor the Prince whom you are about to give to France—for the duke feels satisfied that it

will be a Prince—may suffer from contradiction, or annoyance of any kind."

"I thank M. le Grand-Maître;" said the Queen at length, in a voice of great exhaustion; "but it is impossible for me to feel either calm or happy while you persist in preferring the society of persons who are obnoxious to me, to my own. My very dreams are embittered by this consciousness; and doubly so, because I have reason to know that while I am their victim, they are false even to yourself; and, moreover, detest you in their hearts. You may doubt this;" she added with greater energy; "but I appeal to the duke himself, and he will tell you if this is not the case."

M. de Sully, however, felt no inclination to offer his testimony to the truth of an assertion of this nature—the position involved too great a responsibility to be agreeable even to the experienced statesman himself; and he accordingly, with his accustomed prudence, generalised the subject by declaring that he experienced a heartfelt satisfaction in perceiving that their Majesties had at length yielded to a feeling of mutual confidence, which could not fail to put an end to all their domestic discomfort; adding that if he might presume to offer his advice, he would suggest that should any new subject of difference arise between them, they should immediately refer it to the arbitration of a third person, upon whose probity and attachment they could severally rely; and resolve to leave the whole affair totally in his hands, without aggravating the evil by any personal inter-

ference, or even considering themselves aggrieved by the remedy which he might suggest.

He then offered, should they place sufficient confidence in his own judgment and affection, to become himself the arbitrator whom he recommended; and he had no sooner done so than the King eagerly declared himself ready to comply with his advice, and to sign a pledge to that effect; but Marie de Medicis, who was as well aware as her royal consort that the first step adopted by Sully would be the exile of her Italian followers, was less willing to bind herself by such an engagement; and she therefore merely remarked that the proposition had come upon her so suddenly, that she must have time to reflect before she thus placed herself entirely in the hands of a third party. She then, as if anxious to terminate the discussion, summoned her women; and the duke, by no means reluctantly, withdrew.*

At this period the King made a journey into Limousin, at the head of a body of troops, in order to overawe the malcontents in that province; and while at Orleans he withdrew the seals from Pomponne de Bellièvre; in order to bestow them upon Sillery, the former, however, retaining the empty title of chief of the privy council. The pretext for this substitution was the failing health of the chancellor; but it was generally attributed to the influence of Madame de Verneuil, in whose fortunes M. de Sillery had always exhibited as lively an interest as he had previously done in those of the Duchess de Beaufort. Let it, however, have

* Sully, Mém., vol. vi, pp. 151—161.

arisen from whatever cause it might, it is certain that the veteran statesman deeply felt the indignity which had been offered to him; for Bassompierre asserts that when he shortly afterwards visited M. de Bellièvre at Artenay, and that the indignant minister commented with considerable bitterness upon his recent deprivation, he vainly endeavoured to reconcile him to the affront by reminding him that he was still in office, and would preside at all the councils as chancellor, as he immediately replied with emphasis: "My friend, a chancellor without seals is an apothecary without sugar."*

On the 10th of February the Queen gave birth to a second daughter† in the palace of the Louvre, to her extreme mortification; the astrologers whom she had consulted having assured her that she was about to become the mother of a Prince. The citizens of Paris were, however delighted, as no royal child had been born in the capital for a great length of time;‡ while the princes and nobles, throughout the whole of the following month, vied with each other in their efforts to entertain their Majesties, and to cause them to forget their disappointment. It would appear, indeed, that Marie herself soon became reconciled to the sex of the infant Princess, as Bassompierre has left it upon record, that even before she was sufficiently recovered to leave her room, she used to send for him

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 45.

† Madame Christine de France, who subsequently became Duchess of Savoy.

‡ L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 365.

to play at cards with her; an invitation which was always welcome to the handsome and dissipated courtier.* She no sooner appeared in public, however, than other and more brilliant amusements were provided for her; consisting of jousts, and banquets, Italian comedies, and court balls; but all these were exceeded in interest by a ballet that was performed on horseback in the great court of the Louvre, which had been thickly strewn with sand and surrounded by barriers, save at one opening opposite the seats prepared for their Majesties, through which the four nobles by whom the entertainment had been devised, were to enter with their respective trains from the Hôtel de Bourbon.

The balconies and windows of the palace were crowded with splendidly dressed nobles and courtiers of both sexes, while a dense mass of people occupied every available spot of ground beyond the enclosure, where platforms had also been erected for the more respectable of the citizens and their families. The King and Queen were seated in the balcony of the centre window, which was draped with crimson velvet, having on their right and left several of the princes of the blood, and ladies of the highest rank; while immediately behind them were placed the great officers of the crown, and the captains of the body-guard. The hour selected for this novel and extraordinary exhibition was ten at night; and hundreds of lamps, and double the number of torches were affixed to the *façade* of the palace, towards which every eye

* Mémoires, p. 46.

was upturned from the compact crowd below. The ballet was designed to represent the four primary Elements; and the appointed moment had no sooner arrived than a flourish of trumpets announced the approach of the Duke de Bellegarde, who with his party, were to personate Water. The procession was opened by twenty-four pages habited in cloth of silver, each attended by two torch-bearers; these were followed by twelve Syrens playing on hautboys, who were in their turn succeeded by a pyramid, whose summit was crowned by a gigantic figure of Neptune, surrounded by water-gods, and marine divinities and insignia of every description. This stupendous machine paused for a moment beneath the window of their Majesties, and the aquatic deities having made their obeisance, it passed on, and gave place to twenty-four other pages, habited and attended like the former ones. These preceded the duke himself at the head of twelve young and brilliant nobles, all clad in cloth of silver, with plumes of white feathers in their jewelled caps, and their horses richly caparisoned in white and silver. Having made the tour of the court, the whole party drew closely together in one angle of the enclosure, in order to make way for the second troop, but not before they had exhibited their equestrian skill, and elicited not only the approving comments of the courtly groups who contemplated them from above, but also the vociferous acclamations of the admiring thousands by whom they were hemmed in. The Duke de Bellegarde and his train had no

sooner taken up their station than a second *fanfare* greeted the approach of the powers of Fire, who were ushered in by twenty-four pages dressed in scarlet, closely followed by four blacksmiths dragging an anvil, upon which, when they reached the centre of the court, they began to strike with great violence, and at every blow discharged such a shower of rockets into the air, that many a fair dame crouched behind her neighbour for protection from the falling sparks; while the lamps and torches which lit up the palace walls were momentarily eclipsed. As the last rush of rockets burst, and fell back in a Danaëan shower, a train of salamanders, phœnix, and other anti-inflammable creatures, appeared in their turn, and were followed by the Duke de Rohan, attired as Vulcan, with his twelve companions in the garb of Parthians, all similarly dressed, and armed with lances, swords, and shields, on which their arms were splendidly emblazoned. Renewed feats of dextrous horsemanship were exhibited by this brilliant band; after which, as their predecessors had previously done, they established themselves in an angle of the lists; and made way for the representatives of Air. First came the pages, forming an escort to the goddess Juno, with her attendant eagle, and a multitude of other birds, all skilfully imitated and grouped; and when the feathered pageant had passed on, appeared the Count de Sommerive* and his

* Charles Emmanuel de Lorraine, Count de Sommerive, second son of the Duke de Mayenne, who restored the city of Laon to the King in 1594, and died at Naples in 1609.

noble band, all wearing the same costume and bearing the same arms. Lastly came Earth, in which the pages were succeeded by two enormous elephants, artistically constructed, and bearing upon their backs small towers filled with musicians, who, as they advanced, poured out a volume of sweet sound, to which several horses, draped with cloth of gold, and led by Moors, moved in cadence like the grooms by whom they were conducted. Then followed more pages, and a band of trumpeters, whose occasional flourishes overpowered the softer instruments of those who marched in front; and finally, twelve Moorish knights, led by the Duke de Nevers,* all resplendent with gold and jewels, closed the procession, and fell back to the remaining extremity of the enclosure. A combat then commenced between the knights of Earth and those of Water; first single-handed, then in couples, and finally troop against troop; and so soon as this had terminated, the cavaliers of Air and Fire went through the same evolutions; when each having exhibited his dexterity in the *manège* and his skill in arms, the whole of the four bands joined in the *mêlée*, shivering their lances, their arrows, and their shields; and then each of the combatants seized a torch which had been

* Charles de Gonzaga de Clèves, Duke de Nevers, was the son of Louis de Gonzaga, Prince of Mantua, Duke de Nevers, and Governor of Champagne (who died in 1601, and to whose title he succeeded), and of Henriette de Clèves, Duchess of Nevers and de Rêthel.

prepared for him, and after having ridden round and round each other, making the wandering lights assume the appearance of meteors, the entire company formed once more into order, and returned to the Hôtel de Bourbon like a long line of fire.*

These were precisely the entertainments that Henry IV. was eager to encourage, as they involved an amount of outlay which frequently crippled the means of those by whom they were exhibited for several years; and he was accustomed to declare that it was frequently to the poverty of his nobles that he was indebted for their fidelity, as they no sooner found themselves in a position to arm a few retainers and assume the offensive, than they forthwith began to organise a cabal.

The King having, in the month of March of this year, determined upon proceeding in person to quell the disturbances in the provinces, and to compel the Duke de Bouillon, who was known as the instigator of these disorders, to obedience, made preparations on an extensive scale for this purpose, and raised a powerful army in order to prove his resolution to terminate all similar attempts. In this project he was warmly encouraged by the Queen, who was to accompany him in his journey, the Duke de Sully having urged her with the most earnest arguments, to suggest to his Majesty that although he was able personally, from

* Mercure Français, 1606, pp. 100, 101.

his prowess and authority, to resist the insidious aggressions of M. de Bouillon, the case would be widely different were the infant Prince by any sudden dispensation of Providence to be called upon to supply his place. "The rebel duke, Madam;" said the prudent and upright minister; "would prove a formidable enemy to a woman and a child; and this should be looked to while your royal consort is still in the plenitude of health and strength."

Marie de Medicis at once felt the force of this reasoning; and although the caution might probably appear to her as somewhat premature, she nevertheless lost no time in entreating the King to make such an example of the restless and ambitious Bouillon, as might deter others from following in his track.

"You are at once right and wrong, *ma mie;*" replied Henry with his usual promptitude; "There can be no doubt that the temper and projects of this man tend to disturb the peace of the kingdom, and that were he to lose his head a great peril would be escaped; but we must not forget that he is a prince of the blood, and that he may be severely punished through his pride. I have resolved to take Sedan out of his hands, and to humble him upon the very threshold of his power; and this vengeance upon his rebellion will be ample, as he has taught himself to believe that I dare not attack him in his stronghold. Once subdued he will be undeceived; and I shall then be enabled to pardon him without having my clemency mistaken for fear; and I will take

such measures as shall ensure his future submission."*

On the 15th of the month, the Court of Parliament, on a summons from the sovereign, proceeded to the Louvre, where Henry explained to them his reasons for besieging the Maréchal de Bouillon in Sedan, and possessing himself of the town and citadel. "A failure;" he concluded; "is impossible; and as an earnest of success the Queen will accompany me. To-morrow we commence our journey; but do not conceive that I set forth against the duke with any preconceived design of vengeance. My arms will be open to him should he acknowledge his error, for I have been his benefactor, and have made him what he is. But should he decline to offer his submission and to recognise my authority, I trust that God will favour my arms. Above all things, during my absence, I entreat of you to administer the strictest justice; and I leave in your hands the Dauphin, my son, whom I have caused to be removed from St. Germain to Paris, in order to place him under your protection; and I do so with the most entire confidence, as next to myself he should be to you the most sacred trust on earth."†

On the morrow accordingly the King and Queen set forth, accompanied by a brilliant retinue, and closely followed by the Duke de Sully with fifty pieces of ordnance, and twenty-five thousand men; a fact which

* Richelieu, La Mère et le Fils, vol. i, p. 14.

† Mercure Français, 1606, p. 102.

was no sooner ascertained than the rebel maréchal dispatched messengers to Torcy, the frontier village of France, who were authorised to pledge themselves that the duke was willing to deliver up the citadel of Sedan for the space of ten years, if at the termination of that period his Majesty would consent to restore it, should he, in the interim, have become satisfied of his loyalty and devotion. He, however, annexed another condition to his surrender, which was that an act of oblivion should be passed, and that he should never thenceforward be subjected to any injury, either of property or person, for whatever acts of disobedience to the royal authority he might have previously been considered responsible, and should be left in untroubled possession of all his honours, estates, and offices under the crown.

Having carefully perused this treaty, the King at once consented to the proposed terms, on the understanding that the maréchal should on the following morning present himself at Donchery, where the court were to halt that night, before their Majesties should have risen. This he accordingly did on the 21st, when upon his knees beside the royal couch, he repeated and ratified the pledges of fidelity contained in his appeal for pardon, and had the honour of kissing hands with both sovereigns; the King assuring him as he did so, that he valued the citadel of Sedan far less than the recovery of so valued a friend and subject.

Their Majesties then made a solemn entry into the city, attended by a train of princes and nobles, and were

received with loud and long-continued shouts of "Long live the King!" "Long live the Queen and the Dauphin!" Salvos of artillery were fired from the ramparts of the town and the citadel, and the whole progress of the royal *cortège* through the streets resembled a triumphal procession. In the evening the entire city was illuminated; and the vociferous cheering of the excited people testified their delight at the bloodless and peaceful termination of an expedition from which they had anticipated for themselves only danger and distress.

The whole population was in a state of delirium: the royal equipages as they traversed the streets were followed by admiring crowds; the gay and gaudy nobles were watched by bright eyes, and welcomed by rosy lips; the civic authorities dreamt only of balls and banquets; and in short, the rock-seated city, bristling as it was with cannon, and frowning with fortifications, appeared to have become suddenly transformed into the chosen abode of the Loves and Graces.

Having remained five days at Sedan, the King appointed a new governor and returned to Paris, whither he was accompanied by the whole of the royal party, which was moreover augmented by the presence of the Duke de Bouillon, who, according to Bassompierre, was as much at his ease, and as arrogant in his deportment, as though he had never incurred the risk of the headsman as a rebel and a traitor. The court dined at La Roquette, and it was near dusk when they reached the barrier St. Antoine, where they were met by the

corporate bodies. Henry himself rode on horseback, preceded by eight hundred nobles in full dress; and followed by four princes of the blood, in whose train came other princes, dukes, and officers of the court, among whom were the Mārēchal de Bouillon and Prince Juan de Medicis. The Queen occupied her state coach, having beside her the Duchesses de Guise and de Nevers, and the Princess de Conti. As the royal party halted at the barrier, the civil lieutenant, M. de Miron, provost of the merchants, delivered a congratulatory address to the King in the name of the city; but this loyal effusion was rendered inaudible by the booming of the cannon from the Bastille, and the crashing and whizzing of the rockets and other fireworks, which, by order of the Duke de Sully, were let off immediately that the monarch had passed the gates.* So soon as the address was terminated, the gorgeous procession resumed its march, Sully riding on the left hand of the King, by whom this enthusiastic reception had been deeply felt; nor did his gratification suffer any decrease on observing as he passed on that every window upon his way was crowded with fair and animated faces. As he glanced towards the Bastille, the minister attracted his attention to the Countess d'Auvergne, who had latterly been permitted to visit her husband, and who was gazing wistfully from one of the narrow casements. As Henry recognised her, he withdrew his plumed cap, and bent his head with a courtesy and kindness which was

* Mercure Français, 1606, p. 106.

remarked and commented upon by those around him; but his most gracious recognition was vouchsafed to the Countess de Moret; who was seated at a window in the Rue St. Antoine, surrounded by a bevy of beauties, who only served to render her own loveliness the more conspicuous.*

Thus, amid the deafening report of the artillery, and the enthusiastic plaudits of the people, Henry and his Queen at length reached the Louvre, and terminated their bloodless campaign.

On the 30th of May the legal courts, after three long and patient sittings, declared the ex-Queen Marguerite to be the lawful heir to the counties of Auvergne and Clermont, the barony of La Tour, and other estates which had appertained to the late Queen Catherine de Medicis; asserting that they had hitherto been unjustly possessed by Charles de Valois, who had also wrongfully derived his title of Count d'Auvergne from one of them; and directed that the said territories should forthwith be transferred to the ex-Queen Marguerite, to whom they rightfully belonged. When this decision was pronounced, the Princess was assisting at the celebration of mass in the church of St. Saviour, whither M. Drieux her chancellor at once proceeded with the glad tidings, which he had no sooner imparted, than, overjoyed by the intelligence, she rose from her knees before the service was concluded, and leaving the church, hastened to the monastery of Cordeliers, where

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 358.

she caused a "Te Deum" to be chanted in gratitude for her success.

A few days subsequently, while at the Louvre, the ex-Queen, in the presence of Marie de Medicis, made a donation of the recovered estates to the Dauphin, on condition that they should be annexed to the crown, and never under any consideration, or upon any pretext, alienated. Marguerite, however, reserved to herself the income derivable from these possessions during her life; and she no sooner found her means adequate to the undertaking, than she commenced the enlargement of the hôtel which she had previously purchased in the Faubourg St. Germain, near the Pré aux Clercs, and the embellishment of the spacious gardens which swept down to the bank of the river opposite the Louvre.

Here it was, under the very shadow of the palace which should have been her home, that Marguerite held her little court; passing from her oratory to scenes of vice and voluptuousness, which, happily, are unparalleled in these times; one day doing penance with bare feet and a robe of serge, and the next reposing upon velvet cushions, and pillowed on down—now fasting like an anchorite, and now feasting like a bacchante; one hour dispensing charity so lavishly as to call down the blessings of hundreds on her head, and the next causing her lacqueys to chase with ignominious words and blows from beneath her roof the honest creditors who claimed their hard-earned gains. Extreme in everything, she gave a tithe of all that she possessed

to the monks, although she did not shrink from confessing that her favourites cost her a still larger annual sum; and while she encouraged and appreciated the society of men of letters, and profited largely by their companionship, she condescended to the most frivolous follies, and abandoned herself to the most licentious pleasures.*

The insipidity of Madame de Moret soon counteracted the spell of her beauty; and although on his return from Sedan the King had appeared to be more fascinated by her extraordinary loveliness than even at the first period of their acquaintance, it was not long ere he listened with a patience very unusual to him, to the indignant remonstrances of the Queen on this new infidelity, and even assured her that her reproaches were misplaced. Marie, who perceived the prodigality with which the King lavished upon the frail fair one the most costly gifts, and who saw her, through the mock marriage which she had contracted, assume a place at court which occasionally even brought her into contact with herself, could not so readily lay aside her suspicions; and although she had at first rejoiced to find that the fancy of the monarch could be diverted from Madame de Verneuil, she had never anticipated that the *liaison* would have endured so long. Henry, however, profited by this mistake; and while the Queen was still jealously watching the proceedings of Madame de Moret, he renewed with less secrecy his commerce with the witty

* Mezeray, vol. x, p. 282.

and seductive marquise, unconscious that she was at that period encouraging the addresses of the Duke de Guise. Nor did this partial desertion tend to wound the vanity of Madame de Moret, or to excite her ire against her rival; for once more the Prince de Joinville, who appeared to take a reckless pleasure in braving the anger of the monarch, had found favour in the eyes of one of his mistresses, and was established as the admitted lover of the facile countess. Thus deceived on both sides, Henry had no annoyance to apprehend from either of the frail rivals; but such could not long remain the case with the Queen. There were too many eyes and ears about her ever open to discover and to retain the gossipry of the court, and too many tongues ready to reveal all which might at the moment appear acceptable to her wounded feelings, and insatiable desire to dwell upon the details of her unhappiness.

Princes should pause before they err, for they are a world's beacon. Every eye turns towards them for example and for support; and thus, where the one is evil, and the other wanting, the results of the failure may prove incalculable. The flaw in the diamond, the alloy in the gold, the stain in the purple, the blot upon the ermine—all these are detected upon the instant; the value of the jewel is decreased, the price of the metal is deteriorated, the glory of the hue is tarnished, the purity of the mantle is sullied; and where

minor imperfections may pass unperceived, a mighty social lens is for ever bearing upon the great.

Angered and disappointed, the Queen, who had passed a short time in comparative tranquillity, once more found herself a prey to mortification and neglect; and so greatly did she resent the renewed intercourse between Henry and his favourite that for upwards of a fortnight not a word was exchanged between the royal pair.* At length, however, through the intervention of Sully, Sillery, and the other ministers, a sort of hollow peace was effected, and the court removed to St. Germain, where the royal children constantly resided. Here they remained until the 9th of June, on which day, notwithstanding the unfavourable state of the weather, they set forth on their return to the capital. Their Majesties occupied a coach, in which, together with themselves, were the Princess de Conti and the Dukes of Vendôme and Montpensier:† other carriages followed with the

* Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, pp. 102, 103.

† Henry de Bourbon, Duke de Montpensier, Governor of Normandy, peer of France, Prince of La Roche-sur-Yon, Dauphin d'Auvergne, &c., was born in Tourraine in 1573. During the lifetime of his father, he bore the title of Prince de Dombes. The King confided to him the command of the army which he dispatched to Brittany against the Duke de Mercœur. He subsequently became Governor of Normandy, and reduced that revolted province, which still held out for the League, to obedience. He was present at the memorable siege of Amiens in 1597, where he led the van-guard of the army, and accompanied

ladies of the Queen's retinue; and a numerous train of nobles and attendants on horseback preceded the body-guard. At that period no bridge existed at Neuilly, where the river was crossed in a ferry-boat which was waiting to receive the royal party, who, in consequence of the heavy rain, were driven on board; but unfortunately the beating of the water against the side of the frail bark, occasioned by the swollen state of the stream and the violence of the wind, so terrified the leaders of the royal coach, that it had no sooner left the land, than they swerved so violently as to destroy the equilibrium of the boat, which instantly capsized, when the carriage was upset into the water, and immediately filled. The King, who was an excellent swimmer, was soon rescued by the attendants, a score of whom threw themselves from their horses into the river to afford assistance; but he no sooner reached the bank than he once more swam back to the rescue of the Queen and her companions. Marie, however, was already in safety, having been with considerable difficulty carried to land by the Baron de la Châtaigneraie,* who was compelled to seize her by her hair, to prevent her from being carried down by the current, and who,

Henry on his expedition against Savoy and Brescia. He was a knight of all the King's Orders, and presided at the assembly of the nobles of Rouen. He died in Paris, of lingering consumption, in 1608.

* The Baron de la Châtaigneraie was an officer of the Queen's guard.

having placed her under the care of her ladies, returned to the assistance of the Duke de Vendôme, whom he also succeeded in saving. The Princess de Conti and M. de Montpensier, having been immersed on the landward side of the carriage, were rescued with comparative ease; but the peril had nevertheless been great, and the consternation general. Marie de Medicis, when brought on shore, was in a state of insensibility, and it was a considerable time before she recovered consciousness; nor had she yet opened her eyes when she gasped out an agitated inquiry for the King.* Finally, however, all the party were enabled to take possession of one of the carriages of the suite, and to pursue their journey; but not before the Queen had desired that the person by whom she had been saved should be desired to attend her; upon which M. de la Châtaigneraie presented himself, with the water pouring from his embroidered mantle; and it was not without surprise and gratification that their Majesties ascertained that not only the gallant Châtaigneraie, but also several other members of the royal escort, had flung themselves into the river, without waiting to throw off either their cloaks or swords.† Marie made her acknowledgments to the gallant young noble with an earnest courtesy which would in itself have been a sufficient recompense for his exertions; but while speaking, she also detached from her dress a

* Richelieu, La Mère et le Fils, vol. i, p. 18. Mercure Français, 1606, p. 107. L'Etoile, vol iii, p. 370, note.

† Mercure Français, 1606, p. 107.

magnificent diamond cluster, valued at four thousand crowns, which she tendered to him with the intelligence that he was from that moment the captain of her body-guard, and that she should thenceforward further his fortunes.

"And now, gentlemen;" said the King gaily, as the agitated and grateful young courtier knelt to kiss the hand which was extended towards him; "let us resume our journey. When we left Fontainebleau I was, as you all know, suffering agonies from toothache, which is now cured; this bath has been the best remedy I have ever applied; and if any of us dined too heartily upon salt provisions, we have atleast the satisfaction of feeling that we have been enabled to drink freely since."*

A few hours after his arrival in the capital, the King paid a visit to the Marquise de Verneuil, to whom he related the escape of himself and his companions;† but even on so serious an occasion as this, and one which had threatened such tragical consequences to the Queen, the

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 370.

† It had frequently been foretold to the King that he would die in a carriage, and the prophecy had made so great an impression upon his mind, that he always endeavoured to conceal it under a show of gaiety, particularly when any accident occurred by which it appeared likely to be verified. In the year 1597, while he was travelling near Mouy, in Picardy, the coach in which he rode was precipitated down a precipice; while the danger incurred at Neuilly was scarcely less great; and the prediction was fatally accomplished in 1610.—*Lettres de Nicolas Pasquier*, Book I, lett. i.

insolent favourite could not comment without indulging in the sarcastic and bitter pleasantry which she always affected in making any allusion to her royal mistress. After feeling or feigning great anxiety on the subject of Henry's own escape, she said with malicious gaiety: "Had I been there, when once I had seen you safe, I should have exclaimed with great composure, 'The Queen drinks.' "*

Unfortunately, the King, taken by surprise, laughed heartily at this sally; a circumstance which was duly reported to Marie de Medicis, and which greatly increased her irritation. This new cause of offence was so grave that she could not forgive the levity of the King more readily than the heartless insolence of his mistress; and she carried her resentment to so extreme a pitch that she refused to receive him in her apartments. Such a determination was naturally productive of serious confusion in the palace, as it infringed upon all the accustomed etiquette of the court, and created great perplexity among the officers of state; but remonstrances were vain. Marie, stung to the soul by the insult to which she had been subjected, and which her royal consort had not only suffered to pass unrebuked, but to

* In order to render this impertinence intelligible, it is necessary to explain that anciently, when the sovereigns of France were about to swallow their first draught at table, the cup-bearer announced in a loud voice: "The King drinks;" upon which a flourish of trumpets, at a given signal, announced the important fact to those who were not present.

which he had in some degree contributed, would not rescind her resolution; while the King was, in his turn, equally violent. In vain did the Duke de Villeroy, Sully, and others of the great nobles, endeavour to mediate between them: reason was lost in passion on both sides; and once more Henry declared his determination to exile the Queen to one of his palaces. From this extreme measure he was, however, dissuaded by his ministers; and at length, after the estrangement between the royal couple had lasted nearly three weeks, a partial reconciliation was effected; but Marie, although she was induced by the representations of her advisers to restrain her indignation, was from that hour alienated in heart from her husband, by whom she felt that her dignity had been compromised both as a Queen and as a wife.

Profiting, however, by this partial calm, several of the nobility proposed to add to the amusements of the carnival, in commemoration of the recent escape of their Majesties, a ballet in which the Queen consented to appear; and the preparations were already far advanced when the King solicited her permission to include Madame de Moret among the performers; but Marie, who had previously condescended to associate herself in a similar exhibition with the Marquise de Verneuil, had been rendered less amenable by recent circumstances, and she peremptorily refused to appear in such intimate association with another of her husband's mistresses. The concession was not one upon which Henry could insist

with any propriety, a fact of which the Queen was so well aware, that in order to terminate the affair as gracefully as possible, she declined altogether either to assist in the entertainment, or even to witness it, a decision which caused it to be abandoned altogether.* This mortification was, however, compensated to the countess by a donation from the King of eighty-five thousand five hundred francs.†

At the commencement of July the King had accredited the Maréchal de Bassompierre as his ambassador-extraordinary to Lorraine, to be present at the marriage of the Duke de Bar, his brother-in-law, with the daughter of the Duke of Mantua, the Queen's niece; and had also furnished him with instructions to invite the Duchess of Mantua‡ to become the godmother of the Dauphin, and the Duke of Lorraine to act as sponsor to the younger Princess. The marriage took place at Nancy, where M. de Bassompierre, as the representative of his sovereign, was magnificently and gratuitously entertained.§ Numerous balls were given, and a joust concluded the festivities; which were no sooner terminated than the courtly envoy communicated the royal invitation, which was received "with proper respect and honour;" and he then hastened his return

* Saint-Edme, vol. ii, pp. 237, 238.

† Sully, Mém., vol. vi, p. 233.

‡ Eleonora de Medicis, wife of Vincent I., Duke of Mantua, and sister to the French queen.

§ Bassompierre, Mém., p. 50.

to Paris, in order to prepare the gorgeous dress already alluded to elsewhere, as having been defrayed by his gains at play.

Towards the close of the month, the two illustrious sponsors reached Villars-Coterets, where they were met by the King and Queen, with the whole court, and thence conducted to Paris. The Duchess arrived in a state coach of such extreme magnificence as to attract immediate notice, but with so slender a retinue as to provoke the sarcasms of the courtiers; who declared that they recognised her rank only by the carriage in which she rode; and *the Mantuan suite* accordingly became a favourite topic with the idle and the censorious. Great preparations were made at Notre-Dame for the ceremony, which was to take place on the 14th of September; and meanwhile nothing was thought of save pleasure and preparation. Bassompierre gives an amusing account of the distress of the tailors and embroiderers of the capital, who were unable to comply with the demands of their employers, and many of whom were kidnapped and carried off by persons of the highest rank, in order to secure themselves against disappointment. All Paris was in turmoil; the great were busy in devising costumes which were to transcend all that had previously been seen at the French court; and the operatives were equally occupied in executing the orders which they received.

In the midst of this excitement, however, the plague, which had long existed in the capital, declared itself

more fatally; several officers of Queen Marguerite's household died under her roof; and the alarm became so great that the King removed his court to Fontainebleau, where the baptismal ceremonies were performed with great magnificence on the day previously appointed.

These ceremonies were so curious and characteristic, that we shall offer no apology to our readers for giving them in detail.

Each of the royal children had been privately baptized a few days after its birth; but the public christening had been hitherto deferred in order that it might be celebrated with becoming splendour. The desire of the King had always been that the Sovereign-Pontiff should act as sponsor to the Dauphin; the eldest son of France being, as he declared, the eldest son of the church, and the successive deaths of Clement VIII.* and Leo XI.† had accordingly delayed the celebration of the ceremony. Paul V.‡ was, how-

* Hippolyto Aldobrandini, subsequently Pope Clement VIII., was born at Fano. He was created a cardinal in 1585, and in 1592 succeeded Innocent IX. He reconciled Henry IV. to the church of Rome; attached the duchy of Ferrara to the Holy See, and organised the famous congregations *de auxiliis* on grace and free-will, and contributed to the peace of Vervins. He died in 1605.

† Alessandro de Medicis, who succeeded Clement VIII. in 1605, and died the same year.

‡ Camillo Borghese, subsequently Pope Paul V., was a native of Rome. A quarrel with the Republic of Venice, which resulted

ever, no sooner apprised of the wishes of the French monarch, than he dispatched a brief to the Cardinal de Joyeuse for registration in the Court of Parliament, by which that prelate was constituted papal legate and representative, and instructed in all things to support the holiness and dignity of the Apostolical See.

The turret-court at Fontainebleau was selected as the most appropriate spot for the construction of the temporary chapel, the great hall of the palace being totally inadequate to contain the thousands who had collected from every part of the country to witness the ceremony.

This immense area was completely enclosed by the costly gold-woven tapestry of which the manufacture had been, as we have stated, introduced and encouraged by the King; and had in its centre a square space, thirty feet in extent, surrounded by barriers, and similarly hung and carpeted with tapestry. In the front of this enclosure stood an altar magnificently ornamented with the symbols of the Order of the Holy Ghost, and a table gorgeously draped, both being surrounded by canopies. Behind the table stood a platform raised three steps from the floor; and in the midst of

in the expulsion of the Jesuits from that state, the reunion of the Nestorians of Chaldea to the Romish Church, and several disputes on particular points of faith, rather appeased than terminated, were the principal features of his pontificate. This Pope greatly embellished Rome. He completed the façade of St. Peter's and the Quirinal, and died in 1621, at the age of sixty-nine years.

this was placed a column covered with cloth of silver, upon which rested the font, protected by a superb christening-cloth, and a lofty canopy. On each side of the altar a gallery had been erected which was filled with musicians; and beneath that upon the right hand was a tapestried bench for the archbishops, bishops, and members of the council; while immediately in front of the shrine were placed the seats of the Cardinal de Gondy, who was to perform the baptismal ceremonies, and the almoners and chaplains of his suite. The whole of the court was lined by the Swiss guards, each holding a lighted torch, whose rays were reflected by the myriad jewels that adorned the persons of the courtly spectators. All the princes of the blood and great nobles wore their mantles clasped and embroidered with precious stones, their plumed caps looped with diamonds, and their sword-hilts encrusted with gems. That of the Duke d'Epernon was estimated at more than thirty thousand crowns; and several others were of almost equal value. The attire of the princesses and ladies of the court was, however, still more splendid, many of them standing with difficulty under the weight of the closely-jewelled brocade of which their dresses were composed, and wearing upon their heads masses of brilliants which might have ransomed a province. The Queen, whose dowry, as we have elsewhere shown, in a great measure consisted of costly ornaments, appeared on this occasion with a magnificence almost fabulous; her robe of

cloth of gold and velvet being studded with no less than thirty-two thousand pearls, and three thousand diamonds.

While their Majesties and their illustrious guests took possession of their respective seats, the prescribed ceremonial of preparation was in progress with the royal children, who had all been placed in state beds covered with ermined draperies under canopies of crimson velvet. Madame Elisabeth, the elder Princess, being surrounded by the ladies who were privileged to assist at her levée, the outer coverlet of her bed was withdrawn by the Countess de Sault and the Countess de Guissen; she was then lifted from it by Madame de Lavardin, undressed by Madame de Randan, and robed in her state costume by the Marquise de Montlor.

Madame Christine the younger was meanwhile uncovered by the Duchess de Guise and Mademoiselle de Mayenne, lifted in the arms of Mademoiselle de Vendôme, undressed by the Duchess de Rohan, and robed by the Duchess de Sully.

The Dauphin underwent the same ceremonies, but he was attended only by princesses of the blood. It was the Princesses of Conti and Soissons who drew off the ermined quilt; the Princess de Condé and the Duchess de Montpensier by whom he was undressed, and Mademoiselle de Bourbon who adjusted his state robes.

When all the royal children were attired, the procession was formed. The Swiss guards moved first, each carrying

a lighted torch, and on arriving within the court they defiled, and, as before-mentioned, lined the walls; the hundred gentlemen on duty in the palace followed; and these were succeeded by the ordinary members of the household, and the gentlemen of the bedchamber all carrying tapers of white wax. After them came the drums, fifes, hautboys, and trumpets, together with nine heralds, behind whom walked the grand-provost of the palace, the knights of the Holy Ghost, and, finally, the children of France with their respective retinues. The first group consisted of the train of the younger Princess, in which the Baron de la Châtre* bore the vase; M. de Montigny† the basin; the Count de la Rochepot the

* Claude de la Châtre, Marshal of France, was the son of Claude de la Châtre, Baron de Nancy, Besigny, and Baune de la Maisonfort. He was created a knight of St. Michael and of the Holy Ghost, by Henry III., in 1588, and was Governor of Berry and Orleans. He distinguished himself in several engagements; and his own valour, combined with the protection of the Constable de Montmorency, of whom he had been a page in his youth, rapidly acquired for him both fortune and renown. After the death of Henry III., M. de la Châtre embraced the cause of the League; when the Duke de Mayenne, at the solicitation of M. de Guise, created him Marshal of France, in which character he assisted at what were called by the Leaguers the States of Paris.

† François de la Grange, Seigneur de Montigny and de Sery, was a member of the court of Henry III., and was one of his *mignons*. He was, under that monarch, successively gentleman of the bed-chamber, captain of the palace-guard, head-steward of the household, and Governor of Berry, Blois, &c. He acquired great distinction by his bravery at the battle of Coutras, and at

cushion; M. de Chemerault the taper; M. de Liancourt* the christening-cap, and the Maréchal de Fervaques† the salt-cellar. The Marquis de Bois-Dauphin‡ carried the infant in his arms, and Madame de Chemerault bore her train. She was followed by a suite of twelve nobles, each bearing a flambeau in his hand; and after these came the Duke de Lorraine as godfather, with Don Juan de Medicis, son of the Grand-Duke Ferdinand of Tuscany, as proxy for the Grand-Duchess of Florence, the other sponsor; the ladies who had assisted at her levée closing the train.

This party had no sooner taken possession of the

the sieges of Aubigny, Rouen, and Fontaine-Françoise, and was admitted a knight of the King's Orders the same year (1595). Finally, in 1616, he was created Marshal of France.

* Nicolas du Plessis, Count de Liancourt, Count de Beaumont, first equerry to the King, and Governor of Paris. He married Antoinette de Pons, Marquise de Guercheville, the widow of Henry de Silly, Count de la Rocheguyon; a lady of extraordinary beauty, who had been reared in the court of Henry III.

† Guillaume de Hautemer, Count de Grancy, Seigneur de Fervaques, knight of the King's Orders, and Marshal of France.

‡ Urbain de Laval, Marquis de Bois-Dauphin, Count de Bresteau, Seigneur de Persigny, &c., was the son of Réné de Laval, second of the name, Seigneur de Bois-Dauphin, and of Jeanne de Lénoncourt-Monteuil, his second wife. He was taken prisoner at the battle of Ivry, and was created Marshal of France by the Duke de Mayenne. Henry IV. confirmed him in this dignity, and restored to him his estates of Sably and Château-Gontier.

place assigned to them, then the second group began to enter the enclosure. First came the Maréchal de Lavardin* with the ewer, then the Duke de Sully with the cushion, next the Duke de Montbazon† with the taper, then the Duke d'Epernon with the christening-cup, and, finally, the Duke d'Aiguillon with the salt-cellar. The Prince de Joinville carried the Princess, whose ermine

* Jean de Beaumanoir, Marquis de Lavardin, was the son of Charles de Beaumanoir, who was killed at the massacre of St. Bartholomew. He had been brought up a Protestant at the court of Henry IV., when that monarch was King of Navarre; but after the death of his father, he embraced the Catholic religion, and at the age of eighteen commenced the career of arms, in which profession he acquired so much celebrity, that he commanded the armies of the King during the absence of the Duke de Joyeuse. In 1595, he was honoured with the cordon of St. Michael, was created a Marshal of France, and his estate of Lavardin was erected into a marquisate. At the coronation of Louis XIII. he officiated as grand-master; was subsequently ambassador-extraordinary in England; and died at Paris in 1614.

† Hercule de Rohan, Duke de Montbazon, and Prince de Guémenée, was born in 1568; and was the father, by his first marriage, of Marie de Rohan, who married Louis Charles d'Albert, Duke de Luynes, from whom she was divorced, in 1621, and who subsequently became the wife of Claude de Lorraine, Duke de Chevreuse. The Duke de Montbazon had issue by his second marriage with Marie d'Avaugour of Brittany in 1628, François, a branch of the house of Soubise, which became extinct in 1787; Marie Eléonore, abbess of the convent of the Trinity at Caen; and Anne, who became the second wife of Louis Charles d'Albert, Duke de Luynes. M. de Montbazon died in 1654.

train was borne by Mademoiselle de Rohan. There was no godfather; and the Duchess d'Angoulême* walked alone as the proxy of the Archduchess Elisabeth of Flanders, immediately behind *Madame*, followed by Mademoiselle de Montmorency as her train-bearer, and the ladies who had assisted at the levée.

Finally appeared the third and last division of the procession, headed by the Prince de Vaudemont,† carrying the taper; and then followed in succession the Chevalier de Vendôme with the christening-cap, the Duke de Vendôme with the salt-cellar, the Duke de Montpensier with the ewer, the Count de Soissons with the basin, and the Prince de Conti with the cushion; the Sieur Gilles de Souvry carried the Dauphin, whose right hand was held by the Prince de Conti; while the train of his velvet mantle, edged with ermine, was borne by the Duke de Guise, behind whom followed twenty great nobles bearing lighted flambeaux. These were succeeded

* Diana of France, Duchess d'Angoulême, born in 1538, was the legitimated daughter of Henry II. and Philippa Duco, a Piedmontese lady. She was first married (in 1553) to Horatio Farnèse, Duke de Castro, who only survived their union six months; and subsequently, to the Maréchal de Montmorency, the son of the Connétable, in 1557, of whom she became the widow in 1579. Her firmness and prudence were conspicuous during the civil wars; and it was through her exertions that the reconciliation was effected between Henry III. and Henry IV., when the latter was King of Navarre. She died in 1619.

† The Prince de Vaudemont was the brother of the Duke de Lorraine.

by the Cardinal-Legate de Joyeuse, who represented Paul V. as sponsor, and the Duchess of Mantua, the godmother; the princesses of the blood who had assisted at the levée closing the procession.

The Dauphin having been placed upon the table, the cardinal approached him, and demanded: "Sir, what do you ask?"

"The sacramental ceremonies of baptism;" replied the little Prince, according to the instructions which he had received from the Almoner of Boulogne.

"Have you already been baptized?" again inquired the prelate.

"Yes, thank God;" said the Dauphin firmly. To all the other interrogations of the cardinal he simply answered: "*Abre nuntio.*"

After the unction, when questioned on his belief according to the ordinary form, the little Prince responded audibly "*Credo;*" and, finally, he recited without error or hesitation, the Lord's Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed.

The princesses were then successively placed upon the table; when the elder was named Elisabeth, after her illustrious godmother the Archduchess of Flanders; and the younger Christine.

The baptismal ceremonies were followed by a grand banquet served upon four different tables. The attendants at that of the King were the Princes of Condé, Conti, and Montpensier; while the Queen was waited on by the Dukes of Vendôme, Guise, and Vaudemont;

the Legate by the Count de Candale and the Marquis de Rosny;* and the Duchess of Mantua by the Baron de Bassompierre and the Count de Sault.

On the following day the morning was occupied by the courtiers in tilting at the ring, the prizes being distributed by the Queen and the Duchess of Mantua; and at dusk the whole of the royal party proceeded to the wide plain which lies to the east of Fontainebleau, in the centre of which the Duke de Sully had caused a castellated building to be erected, which was filled with rockets and other artificial fireworks, and which was besieged, stormed, and taken, by an army of satyrs and savages. This spectacle greatly delighted the court; while not the least interesting feature of the exhibition was presented by the immense concourse of people (estimated at upwards of twelve thousand) who had collected to witness the magnificent pyrotechnic display, and who rent the air with their acclamations of loyalty.†

All further rejoicings were, however, rendered unseasonable by the rapid increase of the plague, which having declared itself with great virulence at Fontaine-

* Maximilian de Béthune, Marquis de Rosny, was the elder son of the Duke de Sully, and of Anne de Courtenay, his first wife. He was superintendent of fortifications, Governor of Mantes and Gergeau, and was destined to succeed his father as grand-master had he survived him. He died in 1634.

† Mercure Français, 1606, pp. 110—113.

bleau, induced the hasty departure of the court; and the illustrious guests having taken leave of the King and Queen laden with rich presents, their Majesties, with a limited retinue, repaired for a time to Montargis.

These baptismal festivities had not, meanwhile, been without alloy to the dissipated monarch. Despite the fascination of the wily marquise, and the charms of the Countess de Moret, Henry was by no means insensible to the attractions of the many beautiful women who followed in the suite of the Queen at the august ceremony just described; and, among others, he especially honoured with his notice the Duchesses of Montpensier* and Nevers.†

In neither case, however, was he destined to be successful; both these ladies possessing too much self-

* Henriette Catherine, Duchess de Joyeuse, daughter and heiress of Henry de Joyeuse, Count de Bouchage, Marshal of France, who died a Capuchin under the name of Père Ange, and of Catherine de la Valette. She had, in 1597, become the wife of Henry de Bourbon, Duke de Montpensier, &c., the last Prince of his line, who dying in 1608 left her a widow. After the death of Henry IV. (1611), she remarried with Charles de Lorraine, Duke de Guise, and died in 1656, at the age of seventy-one years.

† Catherine de Lorraine, daughter of Charles, Duke de Mayenne, and niece of Guise *le Balafré*. She married (in 1599) Charles de Gonzaga, Duke de Nevers, who subsequently became by the death of Vincent I. Duke of Mantua. She died on the 8th of March, 1618, at the early age of thirty-three years.

respect to accord any attention to his illicit gallantries; and this failure, especially with the latter of whom he had become seriously enamoured, only tended to re-engage him with Madame de Verneuil. Throughout all the period occupied by the christening festivities, Madame de Nevers had been the object of his especial pursuit; but so carefully did she avoid all occasions of private conversation, that the King, unaccustomed to so decided a resistance, became irritated to a degree which induced her to escape as soon as she found it practicable from the court; and accordingly, on the very day after the festivals, she left Fontainebleau without any previous intimation of such a design, resisting all the efforts made by the sovereign to detain her. Nor did she yield to his subsequent endeavours for her recal; but on the appointment of her husband during the following year to the embassy at Rome, she accompanied him thither; and several months elapsed, ere she reappeared in France, where her duty having compelled her to pay her respects to the Queen on her return, Henry was so little master of himself as to display his mortification by inquiring who she was, and on her name being announced, to exclaim loud enough for her to hear his reply: "Ha! Madame la Duchesse de Nevers! She is terribly altered."

The shaft fell harmless. The lady evinced the most perfect composure under the royal criticism; and having

fulfilled her duties as a subject towards her sovereigns, she once more withdrew from the court; and terminated her life as she had commenced it, without scandal or reproach.*

* Amours du Grand Alcandre, p. 48. Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, pp. 88—90.

CHAPTER VII.

[1607.]

PROFUSE EXPENDITURE OF THE FRENCH NOBLES — PREVALENCE OF DUELLING UNDER HENRY IV.—MEETING OF THE PRINCE DE CONDÉ AND THE DUKE DE NEVERS—THEY ARE ARRESTED BY THE KING'S GUARD—RECONCILIATION OF THE TWO NOBLES—THE DUKE DE SOUBISE IS WOUNDED IN A DUEL—PROFLIGACY OF MADAME DE MORET—THE KING INSISTS UPON HER MARRIAGE WITH THE PRINCE DE JOINVILLE—INDIGNATION OF THE DUCHESS DE GUISE—A DIALOGUE WITH MAJESTY—THE PRINCE DE JOINVILLE IS EXILED—MADAME DE MORET INTRIGUES WITH THE COUNT DE SOMMERIVE—HE PROMISES HER MARRIAGE—HE ATTEMPTS TO ASSASSINATE M. DE BALAGNY—HE IS EXILED TO LORRAINE — MADEMOISELLE DES ESSARTS — BIRTH OF THE DUKE D'ORLEANS—PEACE BETWEEN THE POPE AND THE VENETIANS — THE QUEEN AND HER CONFIDANTS—DEATH OF THE CHANCELLOR OF FRANCE — DEATH OF THE CARDINAL DE LORRAINE—ROYAL REJOICINGS—THE LAST BALLET OF A DYING PRINCE — BETROTHAL OF MADEMOISELLE DE MONTPENSIER TO THE INFANT DUKE D'ORLEANS — SULLY AS A THEATRICAL MANAGER—THE COURT GAMESTER—DEATH OF THE DUKE DE MONTPENSIER—THE EX-QUEEN MARGUERITE FOUNDS A MONASTERY—INFLUENCE OF CONCINI AND LEONORA OVER THE QUEEN—ARROGANCE OF CONCINI—INDIGNATION OF THE KING—A ROYAL RUPTURE—THE KING LEAVES PARIS FOR CHANTILLY—SULLY AND THE QUEEN—THE LETTER—ANGER OF THE KING—SULLY RECONCILES THE KING AND QUEEN — MADAME DE VERNEUIL AND THE DUKE DE GUISE — COURT GAMBLING—BIRTH OF THE DUKE D'ANJOU—BETROTHAL OF THE DUKE DE VENDÔME AND MADEMOISELLE DE MERCŒUR — RELUCTANCE OF THE LADY'S FAMILY—CELEBRATION OF THE MARRIAGE—MUNIFICENCE OF HENRY—ARRIVAL OF DOM PEDRO DE TOLEDO—HIS ARROGANCE—ADMIRABLE REJOINDER OF THE KING—OBJECT OF THE EMBASSY—PASSION OF HENRY FOR HUNTING — EMBELLISHMENT OF PARIS — EDOUARDO FERNANDES—THE KING'S DEBTS OF HONOUR—DESPAIR OF MADAME DE VERNEUIL—DEFECTIVE POLICY—A BOLD STROKE FOR A CORONET—THE FALLEN FAVOURITE.

CHAPTER VII.

[1607.]

DESPITE the presence of the pestilence the gaieties of the past winter had surpassed, alike in the court and in the capital, all that had hitherto been witnessed in France. The profusion of the nobles, whom no foreign war compelled to disburse their revenues in arming their retainers, and in preparing themselves to maintain their dignity and rank in the eyes of a hostile nation, was unchecked and excessive; while, as we have already shown, the monarch felt no inclination to control an outlay by which they thus voluntarily crippled their resources.

The year 1607 commenced, with the exception of the fatal scourge which still existed in and about Paris, in the greatest abundance, and the most perfect peace. The court celebrated the new year at St. Germain-en-Laye; and on the following day proceeded to Fontainebleau, where during the *carême-prenant** a ballet was

* The *carême-prenant* includes the three days which precede Ash-Wednesday.

danced, and several magnificent entertainments were given to their Majesties by the great nobles of the household. These festivities were, however, unfortunately interrupted by an event which created universal consternation and anxiety. The most glaring evil of the reign of Henry IV. had long been the prevalence of duelling, which he had in the first instance neglected to discountenance; and which had, in consequence, attained to an extreme that threatened the most serious results, not only to the principal personages of the kingdom, but even to those whose comparative insignificance in society should have shielded them from all participation in so iniquitous and senseless a practice. L'Etoile computes the number of individuals who lost their lives in these illicit encounters at several thousands; nor did the tardy edicts issued by the King produce a cessation of the custom. On the 4th of February, the Prince de Condé, conceiving himself aggrieved by some expression used by the Duke de Nevers, sent him a challenge, to which the duke instantly responded; and he was already on the ground watching the approach of his antagonist, when a company of the King's body-guard arrived, who, in the name of his Majesty, forbade the conflict, and escorted the two *quasi*-combatants to the royal presence, where, "more in sorrow than in anger," Henry reprimanded both princes; reminding them of their disobedience to his expressed commands, of the fatal example which their want of self-government would afford to their inferiors, and of the loss which the death of either party would have inflicted

upon himself. He then more particularly addressed M. de Nevers, and reproached him severely for having evinced so little respect for the blood royal of France as to accept, under any circumstances, a challenge from a relative of his sovereign, who should have been sacred in his eyes.*

Whether the arguments of the King convinced the two nobles, or their loyalty sufficed to render them conscious of their error, is unimportant. Henry had the satisfaction to reconcile the misunderstanding between them, and from the royal closet they proceeded to the apartments of the Queen, in order to allay an anxiety which, from her friendship and affection for Madame de Nevers who was then absent on one of her estates, had been painfully great.

The expressed displeasure of the King at these encounters did not, however, as we have already stated, suffice to prevent their frequent occurrence; and on the 22nd of the same month another hostile meeting took place between the Duke de Soubise† and M. de Boccal,

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 411, 412.

† Benjamin de Rohan, Duke de Soubise, was the grandson of Jean de Partenay-Soubise, and the son of René-Rohan. He was a zealous supporter of the reformed faith, and was present at several sieges; but becoming dissatisfied with the citizens of La Rochelle, with whom he took refuge, in 1622, he passed over to England, to solicit assistance; a proceeding which compelled the French court to declare him guilty of *lèse-majesté*, and he subsequently refused to return to his own country when a general amnesty was proclaimed.

which had nearly proved fatal to the former; but it having been proved to the monarch that the antagonist of M. de Soubise had long withstood the provocation of the duke, declaring that he dare not raise his hand against one so nearly connected with the throne; and that he had not yielded until the impetuous and intemperate violence of his antagonist had left him no other resource, Henry, with his usual clemency, forgave the crime.*

In addition to these occurrences, which were moreover succeeded by others of the same description during the month, the anger of the King was excited by a discovery which he made of the infidelity of Madame de Moret. Indulgent to his own profligacy to a degree which rendered him insensible to his self-abasement, Henry was peculiarly alive to the degradation of sharing with a rival the affections, or perhaps it were more fitting to say the favours, of his mistresses. He readily forgot the fact that he had himself been the first to initiate them into the rudiments of vice—to induce them to abnegate their self-respect, and to brave the opinion of the world and their own reproaches—while he could not brook that they should reduce him to a level with one of his own subjects, and that they should so far emancipate themselves as to feel a preference for younger and more attractive men when they had been honoured by his notice. The dissolute monarch did not pause to

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 414, 415.

reflect that with women the national proverb, *il n'y a que le premier pas qui coûte*, is but too often realised, and that he was, in fact, the architect of his own mortification.

Madame de Moret had long been attached to the Prince de Joinville; who, young, reckless, and impetuous, returned her passion, and scarcely made any effort to conceal his rivalry with the monarch. Courtiers have, moreover, sharp eyes, and it was not long ere the King was apprised of the intrigue. Bassompierre relates that he hastened to warn the imprudent lovers of their danger, but that believing him to have some personal motive for his interference, they disregarded the caution;* and the fact of their mutual passion at length became so well-authenticated, that Henry, whose pride rather than his heart was wounded by the levity of the countess, reproached her in the most insulting terms with her misconduct.† Madame de Moret did not attempt to deny her attachment to the Prince; but excused herself by reminding the monarch, that, honoured as she was by his preference, she could not forget that she was merely his mistress, and could anticipate no higher destiny, while M. de Joinville was prepared to make her his wife.

"In that case, Madam;" said the King; "you are forgiven. I can permit my subjects to espouse my mistresses, but I cannot allow them to play the gallants

* Mémoires, p. 57.

† Saint-Edme, vol. ii, p. 238.

to those ladies whom I have distinguished by my own favour. You shall not be disappointed in your expectations, and this marriage shall have my sanction without delay."

It can scarcely be doubted that this ready assent must have been no slight mortification to the vanity of Madame de Moret, while it is equally certain that it was perfectly sincere on the part of the King, although from a cause altogether independent of the countess herself. In fact, the Prince de Joinville having previously rendered himself obnoxious to the monarch by his marked attentions to the Marquise de Verneuil, the latter was anxious to see him married, and thus to rid himself of a dangerous rival. Such an alliance must, moreover, as he at once felt, deeply wound the pride of the Guises, whom it was his interest to humble by every means in his power; and accordingly he hastened upon leaving Madame de Moret, to summon the young Prince to his presence, and to insist upon the fulfilment of his promise.

Startled by so unexpected an order, M. de Joinville feigned a ready compliance; but on his dismissal from the royal closet, he expressed his indignation in no measured terms; declaring that had any other than the sovereign proposed to him so disgraceful an alliance, whatever might have been his rank he would have resented the insult upon the instant; while no sooner did the duchess his mother become apprised of the circumstance, than she hastened to throw herself at the

feet of the King, beseeching him rather to take her life than to subject her son to such dishonour.

"Rise, Madam;" said Henry gravely; "yours is a petition which I cannot grant, as I never yet took the life of any woman, and have still to learn the possibility of doing so."

"A Guise, Sire;" pursued the haughty duchess, as she once more stood erect before him; "cannot marry the mistress of any man, even although that man should chance to be his monarch."

"Every man, Madam;" retorted the King; "must pay the penalty of seeking to humiliate his sovereign, even although that man be a Guise."

"M. de Joinville, Sire, shall never become the husband of Jacqueline de Beuil."

"Neither, Madam;" said the King angrily; "shall he ever become her gallant. This is not the first occasion upon which he has had the insolence to interpose between me and my favourites. I have not yet forgotten his intrigue with Madame de Verneuil; and if I pardoned him upon that occasion, it was not on his own account, but from respect for the relationship which exists between us. Neither, Madam, has it escaped my memory that the house of Guise endeavoured to wrest from me the crown of France; and, in short, finding myself so ill-requited for my indulgence, I am weary of exercising a lenity which has degenerated into weakness. Your son is at perfect liberty to marry

my mistress, since he has seen fit to desire it; and he shall do so, or repent his obduracy in the Bastille, where he will have time and leisure to learn the respect which he owes to his sovereign."

"It is your Majesty who are wanting in respect to yourself;" said the duchess haughtily.

"Madam!" exclaimed the King; "do not give me cause to forget that you are my aunt. I can hear no more until you assume a tone better suited to our relative position. You have heard my resolve, and may retire."

Thus abruptly dismissed, Madame de Guise withdrew, and hastened to apprise her son of the impending peril, upon which he escaped from the capital before the order issued for his arrest could be put in execution; while his relatives endeavoured by humility and submission to obtain his forgiveness. Henry, however, had been too deeply wounded, alike by the levity of the son and the overbearing haughtiness of the mother, to yield to their entreaties; and the only concession which he could be induced to make was a conditional pardon involving the perpetual exile of the culprit.*

Nor was the King, who at once discovered that he had been duped, less inclined to visit upon Madame de Moret the consequences of her falsehood, and he openly declared that she should also have been compelled to

* Saint-Edme, vol. ii, pp. 239, 240. L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 360. Amours du Grand Alcandre, p. 49.

quit the country had she not been on the eve of becoming a mother.*

This event shortly afterwards took place, but, although during the following year Henry legitimated her son,† he ever afterwards treated her with the greatest coldness; nor did the birth of the child in any way affect her position as had been the case with the Duchess of Beaufort and the Marquise de Verneuil, the King contenting himself by sending to her a present of money and jewels, but evincing no disposition to increase her rank.

It would appear, moreover, that the indifference was mutual, as, only a short time subsequently, she encouraged the assiduities of the Count de Sommerive, from whom, according to Sully, there could be no doubt that she did actually obtain a written promise of marriage; and the King was no sooner apprised of the circumstance than he expressed, as he had previously done in the case of the Prince de Joinville, his perfect willingness to consent to the alliance; merely desiring M. de Balagny‡ a gentleman of his household upon whom he could rely, to watch the proceedings of the

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 51.

† Antoine de Bourbon, Count de Moret, the son of Henry IV. and Madame de Moret, was legitimated in 1608, and was killed during the subsequent reign at the battle of Castelnaudary, while serving under the Duke de Montmorency.

‡ Damin de Montluc, Seigneur de Balagny, son of Jean, Prince de Cambray, and of Rénée de Clermont de Bussy d'Amboise. He was one of the most confidential friends of the King.

lovers, and to acquaint him with every particular, should he have cause to suspect that the intentions of the Prince were equivocal. M. de Sommerive, however, who soon discovered that he was an object of *espionnage*, became so much exasperated that, having on one occasion encountered the royal confidant at a convenient moment for the purpose, he drew his sword and attacked him so vigorously that his intended victim was compelled to save himself by flight.

In this instance Henry, who had ceased to feel any interest in Madame de Moret, contented himself by reprimanding the culprit, branding him with the name of assassin, and finally exiling him to Lorraine, with strict orders not to leave that province without his express permission.

We will here terminate the history of the ex-favourite, who has already occupied only too much space. After this last adventure she ceased to make any figure at court, her influence over the monarch having entirely ceased; and seven years subsequent to his death, she became the wife of Réné du Bec, Marquis de Vardes; and the mother of two sons, the elder of whom, François Réné, Count de Moret, was afterwards famous during the reign of Louis XIV. under the title of Marquis de Vardes.*

The estrangement of the monarch from Madame de Moret, coupled with his increasing coldness towards the

* Saint-Edme, vol. ii, p. 241, 242.

Marquise de Verneuil, once more, at this period, restored the unhappy Queen to a comparative peace of mind, which she was not, however, long fated to enjoy; as at the close of the year a new candidate for the royal favour presented herself in the person of Mademoiselle des Essarts.* This lady, who was a member of the household of the Countess de Beaumont-Harlay, had accompanied her mistress to England, whither M. de Beaumont-Harlay† had been accredited as ambassador; and on the return of her patroness to France she appeared in her suite at court, where she instantly attracted the attention of the dissolute King. Her reign was happily a short one; and at the close of two years she retired with the title of Countess de Romorantin, having previously been privately married to the Archbishop of Rheims.‡

We shall pass over in silence the other *liaisons* of

* Charlotte, daughter of François des Essarts, Seigneur de Sautour, equerry of the King's stable, and of his second wife, Charlotte de Harlay de Chanvallon.

† The Count Christophe de Beaumont-Harlay, Governor of Orleans. He died in 1615.

‡ Louis de Lorraine, Cardinal de Guise, son of Henry, Duke de Guise, who was killed at the states of Blois. He obtained a dispensation from the Pope, to effect his marriage with Mademoiselle des Essarts. He was a warlike prelate; and his death, which took place at Saintis in 1621, was caused by the extreme fatigue that he underwent during the campaign of Guienne, and at the siege of Saint-Jean-d'Angély, whither he accompanied Louis XIII.

the monarch, as they were too transitory greatly to affect the tranquillity of the Queen, until we are once more compelled to return to them, in order to record his unhappy passion for the beautiful Princess de Condé—a passion which at one period threatened to involve an European war.

On the 6th of April Marie de Medicis gave birth to her second son, who received the title of Duke d'Orleans, that duchy having always since the time of Philip VI. been the appanage of a prince of the blood, or one of the first nobles of the kingdom. The public rejoicings were universal; and the satisfaction of the King without bounds. The little Prince was privately baptized by the Cardinal de Gondy, until the state ceremonies of his christening could take place; and on the 22nd of the month he was invested by the sovereign with the insignia of St. Michael and the Holy Ghost, in the presence of the cardinals, and the commanders and knights of those Orders, with great pomp; after which a banquet was given by the King in the great hall at Fontainebleau, and at nightfall the park was illuminated in all directions by immense bonfires, and a pyrotechnic display, which was witnessed by admiring and exulting thousands.

The intelligence which reached Paris on the following day that peace had been restored between the Pope and the Venetians, through the intervention of the French monarch; that the papal excommunication which had been fulminated against that republic had been

repealed, and a general absolution accorded, excited the enthusiasm of the French people to its greatest height. They augured from this fact a brilliant future for the little Prince, who had come into the world at the very moment when the great work had been achieved; and this feeling was shared by the august parents of the royal infant. So little can human foresight fathom the designs of the Almighty Disposer of all things! Men congratulated each other in the public streets; and, forgetting the Huguenot origin of Henry, considered him only as the champion of the Romish faith; while they coupled his name and that of the Queen with every endearing epithet of which they were susceptible.

The remainder of the summer was occupied by the monarch in the embellishment of the capital, in high play,* and in his rapidly-waning passion for Madame de Verneuil; while the court resided alternately at Fontainebleau and St. Germain; the Queen confining herself more and more to the society of her children and her immediate favourites, listening with jealous avidity to every rumour of infidelity on the part of her royal consort, and occasionally renewing those unhappy differences by which the whole of their married life had been embittered.

The kingdom was at peace, but anarchy still reigned within the walls of the palace. It is true that the advancing age of the monarch appeared to offer a

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 50.

sufficient guarantee for his moral reformation; but the daily experience of the Queen sufficed to convince her that she must never hope for domestic happiness; and this conviction doubtlessly tended to place her more thoroughly in the power of those treacherous advisers who, in order to strengthen their own influence, did not hesitate to exaggerate (where exaggeration was possible) the painful errors of her husband. She saw herself idolized by the people, who regarded her with earnest affection as the mother of two princes whom they looked upon as pledges for the safety and prosperity of France, while she found herself at the same time an object of indifference to the monarch whom they were destined to succeed; and who, while he lavished upon his children incessant tokens of tenderness, sacrificed her personal happiness to every passing fancy, even at the time that he affected to reproach her with a coldness of which he was himself the cause.

Again we fearlessly repeat that the historians of the time have not done Marie de Medicis justice. They expatiate upon her faults, they enlarge upon her weaknesses, they descant upon her errors; but they touch lightly and carelessly upon the primary influences which governed her after-life. She arrived in her new kingdom young, hopeful, and happy—young, and her youth was blighted by neglect; hopeful, and her hopes were crushed by unkindness; happy, and her happiness was marred by inconstancy and insult. Her woman-nature, plastic as it might have been under more fortunate circumstances,

became indurated to harshness; and it is not they who strive to work upon the most solid marble, who should complain if the chisel with which they pursue their purpose, become blunted in the process.

On the 5th of September of this year died M. de Bellièvre, the Chancellor of France, whose probity and justice had rendered him dear to the people, and in whose eyes the withdrawal of his court favour only tended to enhance his valuable qualities. He was, as a natural consequence, succeeded by Brulart de Sillery, who had already superseded him as keeper of the seals; and his body was attended to the church of St. Germain-l'Auxerrois by a vast concourse of the citizens.

His demise was, in November, followed by that of the Cardinal de Lorraine,* who, with the usual superstition of the age, was declared to have been bewitched because his malady had baffled the skill of his physicians; while that which renders the circumstance

* Charles, Cardinal de Lorraine, Bishop of Metz and Strasbourg, and Abbot of St. Victor-lès-Paris. The Cardinal de Givry succeeded him in the see of Metz, having the Marquis de Verneuil as his coadjutor; while Leopold of Austria replaced him as Bishop of Strasbourg, having been elected to that dignity by the chapter; while the Protestants named George, Marquis of Brandebourg, administrator to that see, which caused great dissension between the two concurrents, until a conciliation was effected through the good offices of Duke Frederic of Wirtemberg, who induced them to enter into a truce for fifteen years, during which period they divided between them the revenues of the benefice, Leopold of Austria retaining the title of bishop.

the more melancholy, is the fact that the individual accused of his destruction was burnt alive at Nancy, after having been previously subjected to a series of lingering tortures.*

The court meanwhile, according to Sully,† was more dissipated than it had been during any previous winter since the arrival of Marie de Medicis in France; while the account given of the state of morals throughout the capital by L'Etoile, is one which will not bear transcription. The new year (1608) commenced in the same manner. Ballets were danced both at the Louvre and at the residences of the great nobles. The ex-Queen Marguerite gave an entertainment in honour of the birth of the young Prince, which terminated with a running at the ring, where the prizes were distributed by herself and her successor; and, finally, the King commanded that an especial ballet for the amusement of the Duke de Montpensier, to whose daughter he was about to affiance the infant Duke d'Orleans, should be executed by the Duke de Vendôme, the Marquis de Bassompierre, the Baron de Thermes, and M. de Carmail, the four nobles of the court who were distinguished by the appellation of "les Dangereux." The august party accordingly proceeded to the hôtel of that Prince, who was then nearly at the point of death, having languished throughout two

* Mercure Français, 1607, p. 228. L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 437, 438.

† Mémoires, vol. vii, p. 7. L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 417, 418.

years in a low decline which had gradually sapped his existence; but notwithstanding the state of debility to which he was reduced, the duke left his bed, and received his royal and noble guests in the hall wherein the ballet was performed.* It may be doubted, however, whether M. de Montpensier did not make this supreme effort in consequence of the proposed alliance, and his anxiety to evince to their Majesties his sense of the honour which was about to be conferred upon himself and his family, rather than from any amusement which he could hope to derive from such an exhibition. Be that, however, as it may, the most magnificent preparations had been made for the reception of Henry and his Queen, who were met at the foot of the great staircase by the duchess, followed by her women, and escorted by a score of pages bearing lighted tapers, and thus conducted to the canopied daïs beneath which their ponderous chairs, covered with cloth of gold, had been placed, with low stools behind and on either side of the throne, for the use of such of the other guests as were privileged to seat themselves in the presence of the sovereign.

The ballet, save as regarded the dying condition of the ducal host, was executed under the happiest auspices. The King, to whom the proposed marriage of the two children was agreeable under every aspect, was in one of his most condescending and complacent moods; while Marie de Medicis, whose affection for all

* Bassompierre, Mém., p. 51.

her offspring amounted to passion, was radiant with delight as she remembered that by the will of the duke all his property and estates devolved upon the young Prince, even should his betrothed bride* not live to become his wife.†

On the following day the affiancing, of which this entertainment had been the prelude, took place with great solemnity. The most costly presents were exchanged, not only by the betrothed children, but also by their royal and noble relatives. This ceremony, owing to the failing health of the duke, was also performed at the Hôtel Montpensier; and was succeeded by amusements of every description; among which those prepared for the occasion at the Arsenal by Sully afforded the most marked gratification to their Majesties. The minister had caused a spacious theatre to be constructed, in which the Italian actors who had been summoned to France by the Queen, gave their representations. This pit or *salle de spectacle* was, as he himself informs us, arranged amphitheatrically, while above were galleries divided into separate boxes, each approached by a different staircase, and entered by a different door. Two of these galleries were reserved entirely for the ladies who were admitted to the performance, and no man, upon any pretext whatever, was permitted to enter them;

* Marie de Bourbon, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, who, after the decease of the Duke d'Orleans, married (in 1626) Gaston Jean Baptiste de France.

† Bassompierre, Mém., p. 51.

an arrangement which appears to be strikingly at variance with the lax morality of the time. So resolved, nevertheless, was Sully to enforce this regulation, that he adds with a gravity curious enough upon such a subject: "This was a point of my police which I would not suffer to be violated, and of which I did not consider it beneath me personally to compel the observance."

To impress, moreover, upon his readers the strength of this determination, he relates an anecdote of which we cannot resist the transcription:

"One day," he says; "when a very fine ballet was represented in this hall, I perceived a man leading a lady by the hand, with whom he was about to enter the women's gallery. He was a foreigner, and I moreover easily recognised by his sallow complexion to what country he belonged. 'Monsieur,' I said to him, 'you will be good enough to look for another door; for I do not think that with your skin you can hope to pass for a lady.' 'My Lord,' replied he in very bad French; 'when you ascertain who I am, you will not, I can assure you, refuse to have the politeness of permitting me to enter with these fair and lovely ladies, however dark I may be. My name is Pimentello; I am well received by his Majesty, and have frequently the honour of playing with him.' This was true, and too true. This foreigner, of whom I had frequently heard, had

* Sully, Mém., vol. vii, p. 8.

won immense sums from the King. 'How, *ventre de ma vie !*' I exclaimed, affecting extreme anger; 'you are then, I perceive, that great glutton of a Portuguese who daily win the money of the King. *Pardieu*, you are by no means welcome here, as I neither affect nor will receive such guests.' He was about to reply, but I thrust him back, saying at the same time, 'Go, go; find another entrance, for your jargon will fail to make any impression upon me.' The King having subsequently inquired of him if he had not thought the ballet magnificent and admirably executed, Pimentello replied that he was anxious to have witnessed it, but that he had been encountered at the door by his finance-minister who had met him with a negative, and shut him out; an adventure which so much amused the monarch that he not only laughed heartily himself, but made the whole court participators in his amusement."*

Banquets, running at the ring, and balls in which the Queen occasionally condescended to join, varied the entertainments; which were, however, suddenly terminated by the death of the Duke de Montpensier, which occurred on the 28th of the month; and so much was the King affected by his demise, that he forbade all the customary diversions during the ensuing carnival.

Nothing could exceed, save in the case of a sovereign, the splendour of the funeral ceremonies observed after

* Sully, Mém., vol. vii, pp. 8, 9.

his decease. He had no sooner expired than his body was carried into a hall richly hung with tapestry, and surrounded by seats and benches covered with cloth of gold, elaborately embroidered with *fleurs-de-lis*, intended for the accommodation of the prelates, nobles, knights, and gentlemen of the duke's household who were appointed to watch beside the corpse. The body lay upon a state bed covered with cloth of gold which swept the floor, and was bordered with ermine. He wore his ducal robes, with a coronet, and the great collar of St. Michael; and had his white-gloved hands crossed upon his breast. At the foot of the bier stood a small table upon which lay a massive silver crucifix; and near it a second supporting a vase of holy water. In this state the deceased duke remained during eight days; the officers of his household waiting upon him in the same manner, and with the same ceremonies as when he was alive. A prelate said the grace; the water was presented to the vacant chair of the Prince, in which while in existence he had been accustomed to lave his hands previously to commencing a meal; the different courses were placed upon the table by the proper officers; a silver goblet was prepared at the same moment in which he had formerly been in the habit of taking his first draught; and, finally, the same prelate uttered a thanksgiving, to which he added a *De profundis*, and the prayer for the dead; when the food that had been served up was distributed to the poor.

At the termination of the eight days the funeral service was performed at Notre-Dame, in the presence of the knights of the Holy Ghost, all wearing their collars. The chief mourners were the Princes of Condé and the Count de Soissons, the cousins of the deceased duke; and his funeral oration was delivered by M. de Fenouillet, Bishop of Montpellier. The body was then conveyed to Champigny in Poitou, where he was laid to rest with his ancestors.*

Having strictly forbidden all public festivities, Henry removed the court to Fontainebleau; and Marguerite, whose unblushing libertinism formed the proverb of Paris, seized the moment to erect an almshouse and convent upon a portion of the grounds of her hotel. It was stated that the ex-Queen during her residence at Usson, where, as we have already seen, her career was one of the most degrading profligacy, had made a vow that should she ever be permitted to revisit Paris, she would support a certain number of monks who should daily sing the praises of the Deity; and she accordingly gave to the chapel attached to the convent the name of the Chapel of Praise, while the house itself was designated the Monastery of the Holy Trinity. It was no sooner built than it was given by the foundress to the reformed and bare-footed fathers of St. Augustine; but after having solicited in their favour various privileges which were accorded by the Sovereign-Pontiff,

* Mercure Français, 1608, p. 231. L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 444, 445.

she dispossessed them in the year 1613, and established in their place the Augustine fathers of the congregation of Bourges.

Meanwhile the influence of Concini and his wife over the mind of the Queen unhappily increased with time, until the arrogance of the former became so great that he had the insolence to enter the lists at a great tilting at the ring which was publicly held in the Rue St. Antoine in the presence of the monarch and his court; a piece of presumption which was rendered still more unpalatable to Henry by the fact that the Italian, who was well skilled in such exercises, bore away the prize for which the whole of his own nobility had contended.

So arrogant, indeed, had he become, and so inflated with the consciousness of wealth, Marie de Medicis having been lavish even beyond her means both to his wife and himself, that he entered into a negociation for the purchase of La Ferté, a property estimated at between two and three hundred thousand crowns; and he no sooner ascertained that the Duchess de Sully had waited upon the Queen to entreat of her Majesty to forbid the transfer, as such an acquisition made by an individual who was generally known to be penniless only a few years previously, would necessarily excite the public disaffection towards herself, than he had the audacity to proceed to the Arsenal, and to upbraid that lady for her interference in the most unmeasured and insulting terms, declaring that he

was independent both of the King of France and of his subjects, whatever might be their sex and rank; and that whoever thwarted him in his projects might live to rue the day in which they braved his anger.

This intemperance having come to the ears of the King, his indignation was excessive; but, as on previous occasions, he lacked the moral courage to assert his dignity; and satisfied himself by bitter complaints to Sully of the fatal hold which her two Italian attendants had secured upon the affections of the Queen; and by replying to the reproaches of Marie upon the subject of his new attachment for Charlotte des Essarts, and the continued insolence of Madame de Verneuil, with vehement upbraidings of the vassalage in which she lived to the indecent caprices and shameless extortions of a waiting-woman and her husband.

Marie de Medicis, who had hoped that the rank in her household which had been conceded to Leonora, would protect her for the future against allusions to the obscurity of her origin, was greatly incensed by the tone of contempt still maintained by the King, whenever he made any allusion either to herself or Concini; and eventually these recriminations attained to such a height, that Henry abruptly quitted the Louvre (where the delicate situation of his royal consort had induced him to establish his temporary residence), and proceeded to Chantilly, without taking leave of her. On his way, however, he alighted at the Arsenal, where he informed Sully of the reason of his sudden departure;

and the minister became so much alarmed at this unequivocal demonstration of displeasure on the part of the monarch, that he resolved not to lose a moment in advising the Queen to some concession which might cause the King to return to the capital. After the mid-day meal he accordingly repaired to the Louvre, accompanied only by a secretary who was to await him in an ante-chamber, and made his way to the apartments of Marie. On reaching the saloon adjoining the private closet of the Queen, he found Madame Concini seated at the door with her head buried in her hands, evidently absorbed in thought. She started up, however, when he addressed her; and in reply to his request that she would announce him to her royal mistress, she replied that she would do so willingly, although she apprehended that her Majesty would not receive him, as she had refused entrance to herself. She had, however, no sooner raised the tapestry, and scratched upon the door, than Marie, on learning who was without, desired that M. de Sully should be instantly admitted. When the duke entered he found the Queen seated at a table, busily engaged in writing; and as he approached her with the customary obeisance, she hastily motioned to him to place himself upon a stool immediately in front of her.

"You are right welcome, M. le Ministre;" she said in a tone that was not altogether steady, although she struggled to suppress all outward emotion. "You are doubtlessly already apprised that the King has with-

drawn from the capital in anger, but you have yet to learn that he has left me no whit more satisfied than himself. I was unprepared for so abrupt a departure; and as I had still much to say to him on the subject of our disagreement, I find myself compelled to the exercise of my clerkly skill, and am now occupied in telling him in writing all that I had left unsaid. There is the letter;" she continued with a bitter smile, as she threw the ample scroll across the table; "read it, and tell me if I have not more than sufficient cause to consider myself both aggrieved and outraged."

"Madam," said the incorruptible minister, when he had perused the document thus submitted to him; "you must pardon me if I venture to declare that you must never suffer that letter to meet the eye of your royal consort: it contains matter to induce your eternal separation."

"Can you deny one assertion which I have made?" demanded the Queen impatiently.

"I sympathise in all the trials and troubles of your Majesty;" was the evasive reply; "I would leave no effort untried to terminate them; a fact of which you have long, I trust, Madam, felt convinced; and thus I cannot see you about wilfully to destroy every chance of happiness, without imploring of you to reflect deeply and calmly before you take so extreme a measure as that which you now contemplate. The King is already incensed against you; and if spoken words have thus angered him, I dare not contemplate the consequences

of such as these before me, written hours after your contention. I therefore beseech you to suppress this letter; and both for your own sake, and for that of the French nation, rather to seek a reconciliation with his grace your husband than to increase the ill-feeling which so unhappily exists."

"You make no allowance for me, Monsieur, as a woman and a wife: you only argue with the Queen."

"Madam;" persisted Sully; "in this instance it is rather to the woman and the wife that I address myself, than to the Queen. As a woman the bitterness and invective of this missive;" and he laid his spread hand emphatically upon the paper; "would suffice to cover you with blame, and to deprive you of sympathy; while as a mother it would authorise your separation from your children. Let me entreat of you therefore to forego your purpose."

Marie de Medicis sat silent for a few moments, and then, making a violent effort over herself, she said slowly: "I will in so far follow your counsel, M. le Duc, that I will destroy this letter, although, the Saints bear witness! that it has cost me both time and care to prepare it; but I will yield no further. I am weary of being made the puppet of an unfaithful husband, and his band of unblushing favourites, who receive, each in succession, some high-sounding title by which they are enabled to thrust themselves and their shame upon me in the very halls of the palace. I must and will tell the King this."

"Then, Madam, if such be unfortunately your

decision;" said her listener; "at least, let me urge you to do it in gentler terms."

"I am in no humour to temporise."

Sully made no reply.

"Do not wrap yourself up in silence, Monsieur;" exclaimed the Queen after waiting in vain for his reply; "I believe that you wish to serve me; and you cannot better do so than by putting these unpalatable truths into a less repulsive form. Here are the means at hand; but, mark me, I will not suffer one particular to be omitted."

Under this somewhat difficult restriction the minister proceeded to obey her command; but she argued upon every sentence, and cavilled at every paragraph, which tended to soften the harsher features of the letter. At length, however, the task was completed, and nothing remained to be effected save its transcription by the Queen. The letter was long and elaborate, as Sully had skilfully contrived to terminate every reproach by some reasoning which could not fail to touch the feelings of the King. Thus, after upbraiding her husband with his perpetual infidelities, Marie was made to say that if she complained, it was less for herself, than because, in addition to her anxiety to be the sole possessor of his heart, she could not coldly contemplate the injury which he inflicted upon his person and dignity by becoming the rival of his own subjects, and thus compromising his kingly character; and that if she insisted with vehemence upon the exile of

Madame de Verneuil, her excuse must be found in the fact that in no other way could her peace and honour be secured, or the welfare of her children be rendered sure: those children of whom he was the father as well as the sovereign, and whom she would cause to fall at his feet to implore compassion for their mother. She then reminded him of the numerous promises which he had made to her that he would cease to give her cause of complaint; and terminated the missive by calling God to witness that should he still be willing to fulfil them, she would, on her side, renounce all desire for vengeance upon those by whom she had been so deeply wronged.

Certain, however, it is that, even with these modifications, the letter gave serious offence to Henry, who, shortly after its receipt, wrote to apprise Sully of what he denominated the *impertinence* of his wife; but declared that he was less incensed against her than against the individual by whom the epistle had been dictated; as the style was not hers, and that he had consequently discovered the agency of a third person, whose identity he left it to Sully to ascertain, as he had resolved never again either to serve, or even to see him, be he whom he might, so long as he had life.

With a truth and frankness which did him honour, the finance-minister, despite this threat, did not hesitate when subsequently urged upon the subject by the King, to admit the authorship of the obnoxious document; and in support of his assertion to place in the hands of

Henry the original draught which he had retained. On comparing this with the autograph letter of the Queen, however, Sully at once perceived that she had been unable to repress her anger sufficiently to adhere to his advice, and that the interpolations were by no means calculated to advance her interests.* It was evident, nevertheless, that much of the King's indignation had subsided, and that the delicate health of his royal consort was not without its influence over his mind. Sully adroitly profited by this circumstance to impress upon Henry the danger of any agitation to the Queen, whose impressionable nature occasioned constant solicitude to her physicians; and reminded him that her late violence had been principally induced by the rumours which had reached her of a *liaison* between Madame de Verneuil and the Duke de Guise; an indignity to his own person which she had declared herself unable to brook with patience. In short, so zealously and so successfully did Sully exert himself, that he at length induced the monarch to return to the Louvre, and the Queen to disclaim all intention of exciting his displeasure; in which latter attempt he was greatly aided by being enabled to confide to her that instant measures were to be taken for the disgrace of the marquise, could it be proved that her friendship with the Duke de Guise had exceeded the limits of propriety.

In the beginning of March the court removed to

* Sully, Mém., vol. vii, pp. 25—28.

Fontainebleau, where, while awaiting the *accouchement* of the Queen, Henry indulged in the most reckless gaming; nor did he pursue this vice in a kingly spirit, for even his devoted panegyrist Péréfixe informs us that at this period he knew not how to answer those who reproached his royal pupil with too great a love for cards and dice, of itself a taste little suited to a great and powerful sovereign; and that, moreover, he was an unpleasant player, eager for gain, timid when the stake was a high one, and ill-tempered when he was a loser.* In support of this reluctant testimony, Bassompierre relates, that being anxious to assist at the opening of the States of Lorraine in compliance with the invitation of the duke, he solicited the permission of Henry to that effect on two or three different occasions, but as he always played on the side of the King, and universally with great success, he was constantly refused.

Resolved to carry his point, however, the spoiled courtier at length set forth without any leave-taking; a fact which was no sooner ascertained by the monarch than he dispatched two of the exempts of his guard to arrest him, and bring him back. This they did without difficulty, as Bassompierre did not travel at night; but as the gallant marquis had no ambition to be conveyed to Fontainebleau in the guise of a prisoner, he dispatched a letter to M. de Villeroy, requesting to be liberated from the presence of his

* Péréfixe, vol. ii, pp. 463, 464.

captors, and pledging himself to return instantly to court. On his arrival the King laughed heartily at the idea of his disappointment, which he, however, lightened by pledging himself that in ten days he should be left at liberty to depart.*

On the 25th of April Marie de Medicis became the mother of a third son; upon whom, after some contestation between his illustrious parents, was bestowed the title of Duke d'Anjou. The Queen was desirous that he should be called Prince of Navarre, but Henry preferred the former designation, from the fact that it had been that of many of the French princes who had been sovereigns of Jerusalem and Sicily.† The birth of another Prince to their beloved sovereign filled up the measure of joy in France; the citizens of Paris made costly gifts to the Queen; and the circumstance of the infant having come into the world on the anniversary of St. Louis increased the general enthusiasm.‡ As the convalescence of the royal invalid was less rapid upon this than on previous occasions, the court remained during the spring and a portion of the summer at Fontainebleau, where every species of amusement was

* Bassompierre, Mém., pp. 50, 51.

† Gaston Jean Baptiste de France, originally named Duke d'Anjou, and subsequently Duke d'Orleans, died in 1660. Before his birth, Henry IV. declared his intention of making him a churchman, and causing him to be entitled Cardinal of France.

‡ Mercure Français, 1608, p. 231. Sully, Mém., vol. vii, p. 37. L'Etoile, vol. iii, p. 471.

exhausted by the courtiers. Once only, at the beginning of May, the King resided for a few days in the capital; and on his return Marie manifested such undisguised satisfaction, that he accorded to her the sum of twelve thousand crowns for the embellishment of her château at Monceaux.

So early as the year 1598, during the journey of the sovereign to Brittany, a marriage had been arranged between his son the Duke de Vendôme, and Mademoiselle de Mercœur;* but the mother and grandmother of the young lady had succeeded in inspiring her with such a hatred of the legitimated Prince, that she would not allow his name to be mentioned in her presence; and when she ascertained that the monarch had resolved upon the fulfilment of the contract, she withdrew to the Capuchin Convent, declaring that sooner than become the wife of M. de Vendôme, she would

* Mademoiselle de Mercœur was the only daughter and heiress of Philippe Emmanuel de Lorraine, Duke de Mercœur, the brother of Louise de Lorraine, Queen of Henry III. By that monarch he was appointed Governor of Brittany; but in 1589 he revolted against him, and persisted in his rebellion until 1598, when he entered into a treaty with Henry IV., by which he bound himself to bestow the hand of his daughter, and the reversion of his government, upon César de Vendôme; a condescension by which he subsequently felt himself so much disgraced, that he withdrew from the court, and engaged in the war of Hungary. Pining, however, to see once more his wife and daughter, he was on his way to France for that purpose, when he was attacked by fever at Nuremberg, where he expired in March, 1602, at the age of forty-three years.

take the veil. The Duchess de Mercœur and her mother had been anxious to marry the young heiress to the Prince de Condé, or failing in this project, to some relative of their own, in order to retain her large possessions in the family; but the King had resolved upon securing them to his son by enforcing the promise made by the deceased duke. He accordingly adopted conciliatory measures by which he succeeded in effecting his object; and before the conclusion of the rejoicings on the birth of the infant Prince, the marriage was finally celebrated in the chapel of Fontainebleau with all the pomp and magnificence of which the ceremony was susceptible; while the King appeared beside his son at the altar blazing with jewels of inestimable price, and joined in the festivities consequent upon the alliance with a zest and enjoyment which were the theme of general comment.

The arrival of Don Pedro de Toledo,* the ambassador of Philip III. of Spain at this precise juncture, gave further occasion for that display of splendour in which Henry had latterly delighted; and after his public reception at Fontainebleau the court removed to Paris, where the ambassador had been sumptuously lodged at the

* Don Pedro de Toledo, Constable of Castile, and general of the galleys of Naples, was a relative of Marie de Medicis, whose grandfather, the Count de Medicis, had married Eleonora de Toledo, the daughter of the Viceroy of Naples. He was, moreover, a grandee of Spain, and one of the most confidential friends of Philip III.

Hôtel de Gondy. His arrogance, however, soon disgusted the French king; nor did he hesitate to exhibit the same unbecoming hauteur towards his kinswoman the Queen, who having dispatched a nobleman of her household to welcome him to France in that character, was informed by her envoy that the only answer which he returned to the compliment was conveyed in the remark, that crowned heads had no relatives; they had only subjects.

The sole occasion upon which he laid aside his *morgue*, and then to all appearance involuntarily, was while driving through the streets of the capital in the carriage of the King. He had previously visited Paris, and as he contrasted its present magnificence with the squalor, filth, and disorder which it had formerly exhibited, he could not suppress an exclamation of astonishment. "Why should you be surprised, Monsieur?" demanded Henry; "when you last saw my good city of Paris, the father of the family did not inhabit it; and now that he is here to watch over his children, they prosper as you see."*

The object of this embassy was kept a profound secret; some historians assert that it was undertaken with a view to effect a marriage between the Dauphin and the Infanta of Spain, while others lean to the belief that Philip had instructed Don Pedro to endeavour to prevail upon Henry to abandon his alliance

* Bonnechose, vol. i, p. 445. Péréfixe, vol. ii, p. 564.

with the Dutch. Whatever were its motive, the ambassador, who had reached Paris on the 7th of July, quitted the capital on the 22nd of the same month, having only succeeded in irritating the King by his overbearing and supercilious demeanour.*

It would appear that during the present year Henry IV. indulged his passion for field sports to such an excess as tended seriously to alarm those who were anxious for his preservation; and it indeed seems as though, at this period, his leisure hours were nearly divided between his two favourite diversions of hunting and high-play. Sully informs us, however, that the King busied himself with the embellishments of Fontainebleau, and in erecting the Place Dauphine at Paris; but adds that these great works, which were necessary to the convenience of the people, might have been carried much further if the monarch would have followed his advice, and been less profuse in his personal expenditure, particularly as regarded his gambling transactions. He advances, as a proof of this assertion, that he was called upon on one occasion to deliver to Edouardo Fernandes, a Portuguese banker (who, according to Bassompierre, had made a visit of speculation to the French court, and who unhesitatingly provided the nobles with large sums, either on security, or at immense interest,) the enormous amount of thirty-four thousand pistoles, for which the reckless monarch

* L'Etoile, vol. iii, pp. 474—477. Mercure Français, 1608, p. 232. Daniel, vol. vii, p. 488.

had become his debtor. "I frequently received similar orders; " he proceeds to say; " for two or three thousand pistoles, and a great many others for less considerable sums."*

It is scarcely doubtful that the *ennui* occasioned by the waning passion of Henry IV. for Madame de Verneuil, at this period induced him, even more than formerly, to seek amusement and occupation at the gaming-table, where he was emulated by his profuse and licentious nobles; while even his Queen and the ladies of the court entered with avidity into the exciting pastime. We have frequent record of the habitual high-play of Marie de Medicis, who found in it a solace for her sick-room, and a diversion from her domestic annoyances; and thus the dangerous propensity of the monarch was heightened by the presence of the loveliest women of the land, and the charm and fascination of wit and intellect.

Madame de Verneuil was in despair: the coveted sceptre was sliding from within her grasp; and with the ill-judged hope of regaining the affections of her royal lover by exciting his jealousy, she encouraged the attention of the Duke de Guise; who, undismayed by the previous attempt of his brother to divert the affections of another of the royal favourites and its unfortunate result, at length openly avowed himself the suitor of the brilliant marquise, and even promised to

* Mémoires, vol. vii, pp. 72—74.

make her his wife; while the scandalous chroniclers of the time do not hesitate to affirm that the Prince de Joinville himself had previously done the same, but that his proverbial fickleness had protected him from so gross a *mésalliance.*

In the case of the duke, however, the affair wore a more serious aspect; and so earnest did he appear in his professions, that Madame de Verneuil, anxious at once to secure an illustrious alliance, and to revenge herself upon the monarch, caused the bans of marriage between the Prince and herself to be published with some slight alteration in their respective names, which did not, however, suffice to deceive those who had an interest in subverting her project; and the fact was accordingly communicated to the King, upon whom it produced an effect entirely opposite to that which had been contemplated by the vanity of the lady, who had been clever enough to procure from M. de Guise a written promise similar to that which she had formerly extorted from the monarch. Four years previously the knowledge of such a perfidy on her part would have overwhelmed Henry with anxiety, jealousy, and grief; but his passion for the marquise had, as we have seen, long been on the decline, and his only feeling was one of indignation and displeasure. To the marquise herself he simply expressed his determined and unalterable opposition to the alliance; but to the duke he was far less lenient, reminding him of the former offences of himself and his family, and

forbidding him to pursue a purpose so distasteful to all those who had his honour at heart. This was a fatal blow to Madame de Verneuil, and one which she was never destined to overcome. Clever as she was, she had suffered herself to forget that youth is not eternal, and that passion is even more evanescent than time; and thus, by a last impotent effort to assert a supremacy to which she could no longer advance any claim, she only succeeded in extinguishing in the heart of the King the last embers of a latent and expiring attachment.*

* Dreux du Radier, vol. vi, p. 104.

END OF VOL. I.

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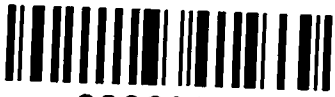
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